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Moccasined Feet

By

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Ginn and Company

Boston · New York · Chicago · London
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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

330.5

The Athenæum Press

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Preface

IN WRITING the story of the beginnings of a country in which romance and history are blended, it is important that the writer should be thoroughly familiar with his subject, not only through patient research and careful study of what others have written but through a personal knowledge of localities and, as far as possible, of the environments and conditions surrounding the characters whom he portrays.

The following story is one my mother used to tell her children from a rich store of early memories. It is a real picture of a real life in the lake-land country about the St. Clair River, when the only settlements were the little villages which clustered around the military forts that were scattered along the waterways. The villagers were a stanch, sturdy people, possessed of very little book knowledge; but they knew a great deal about nature and wood lore, which, under existing circumstances, was of much greater im-

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portance. There were good Indians and there were bad Indians, and the struggle between the races for possession of the new country was prolonged and sometimes desperate. It was because of these conditions that the boys of the eighteenth century became familiar with Indian customs and tactics, and performed deeds that in this age seem almost incredible.

IRENE HOLLANDS WOLFSCHLAGER

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Chapter One

A Race with an Indian

PIERRE ran out and looked into the barrel that stood behind the house. The expectant smile that was on his face disappeared. He was disappointed. Not the faintest peep could he hear. The old sitting hen was motionless, and her head was tucked under her wing. If she heard him at all, she was clever enough to make no sign.

"How many are out, Pierre?" his mother asked, as he entered the house.

"Tom's Jack'll just have to give me back my money. His old eggs aren't good for anything," was the reply. Tom's Jack was the son of the soldier who raised chickens for the officers' table.

"Hold on there, Pierre, hold on. Go slow," said his father, who sat in the chimney corner greasing his long-legged boots with a piece of tallow candle. "Night's a long way off, and you may have a dozen chicks before sunset." Uncle

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Jerry, Pierre's father, knew all about chickens and eggs; Pierre was only an amateur.

Several hours later, when Pierre lifted the hen from the nest, there they were, an even dozen of fluffy chickens, all mixed up with broken eggshells and downy feathers.

"I'll take back what I said, dad," he shouted. "Tom's Jack's eggs are all right."

He carefully packed the chickens in his cap and, with the mother hen pecking at his heels and clucking and scolding, carried them to the new coop that stood by the side of the smoke-house.

Pierre made a special business of raising the chickens. He paid the closest attention to the quality and quantity of their daily food. He counted each feather as it sprouted from the tiny quills, and he taught the chicks to fly to his shoulder or to his head and peck the piece of bread which he held between his teeth.

Every night he gathered them up and carried them into the woodshed, out of reach of foxes and weasels and other four-footed lovers of chicken meat. And besides these enemies, there were the roving Indians, and one never knew

A Race with an Indian

just how far to trust them, especially when they were hungry or thirsty.

Pierre lived in the fort-village on the curve of the Black River, and he knew all about the Indians in that region.

There were both good and bad Indians. The good Indians lived in the village near the fort. They were friendly to the whites, except when on the warpath or crazed with the white man's fire-water.

No one knew just where the bad Indians lived. They belonged to the roving tribes that had no regular homes. They were a mischievous, quarrelsome, thieving lot of wanderers who roamed from place to place with scalping knife and tomahawk, leaving behind them a trail of blood and ashes.

On several occasions the villagers had been roused from sleep in the middle of the night by the terrible war whoops. But Pierre was not afraid, for he lived so near the fort that it was an easy matter to seek safety behind the stockade at the first sign of danger.

At last the chickens grew so large that the old hen refused to mother them any longer, and they

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were obliged to take care of themselves; but Pierre still continued to carry them into the woodshed at night, leaving the old hen to roost alone on the grindstone by the corncrib.

One Saturday night Pierre went to bed much earlier than usual. He had been out hunting squirrels for the Sunday dinner, and he was very tired.

He had a dreadful dream in which he was still hunting squirrels, but they were as large as elephants and made hideous noises, and streaks of fire flashed from their eyes and ears.

Pierre was terribly frightened, but he could not move so much as a finger to save himself. Just at this moment someone shook him roughly and shouted in his ear: "Pierre, Pierre, wake up! The Indians are here!"

In an instant he was on his feet. The room was lighted with the blaze of a burning house close by, and the whoops of the Indians sounded dangerously near.

Everybody was rushing wildly about, gathering together bedding and food and other necessities and carrying them into the fort.

Pierre's first thought was the safety of his

A Race with an Indian

chickens. He ran to the woodshed, grabbed a basket, packed the chickens in it, and carried it inside the stockade.

There was great excitement and confusion as the villagers came running from every direction with their baskets and bundles and crowded through the line of sentinels who guarded the entrance. Everybody was talking at once and asking questions and counting noses, to be sure that all were safe.

Outside the fort the Indians were ransacking the deserted houses and fighting among themselves over the choicest prizes.

Pierre had found a safe place for his chickens, and was standing close by to guard them, when suddenly a thought struck him. He had forgotten the old hen!

Giving the basket a kick, he shoved it into a corner, nearly upsetting it, and started on a run for the gate.

"Let me out, quick!" he shouted to the guard.

"Where are you going, boy? Are you crazy? Do you want to lose your scalp?"

"Let me out, I say," he repeated. He was

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too excited to be respectful; and although the guard braced himself across the entrance to prevent his escape, he ducked under the outstretched arm and disappeared in the shadows of the palisades.

The fort was on one side of the orchard and the corncrib was on the other side. The grindstone, where the old hen roosted, was on the farther side of the corncrib. Pierre was determined to save her if possible.

The trees grew close together, and the leaves were very sparse. Pierre dodged here and there, where the shadows were the blackest, now running very swiftly for a short distance, now slowly crawling on his hands and knees.

The Indians were setting fire to the farther side of the settlement, near the forest. He could hear their voices and could see the black smoke and red flames rising above the little houses where some of his friends had lived.

"There goes Paul's house," he said. Paul was Pierre's chum. "But they won't get him," he continued. "He's safe in the snook hole, I'll bet. All of his folks are over in the fort, but he isn't with 'em."

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Pierre reached the corncrib without difficulty. But he was on the shadowed side, where the Indians could not see him, whereas the grindstone was on the opposite side, in the full glare of the burning buildings, and the hen was on the grindstone.

The corncrib rested on inverted milk pans, and the pans were placed on stilts about a foot high, above the reach of rats and weasels.

Pierre dropped down flat on the ground and crawled under the building. He found the hen's legs, and the next moment he had them clutched in his hand.

Now, if the hen had remained quiet, there would have been no trouble. But unfortunately for her own welfare she gave a loud squawk when Pierre pulled her down toward him, and before the squawk was ended he caught sight of two moccasined feet near the whetstone.

"Wough! Ka-win, Ka-win," exclaimed a deep, rough voice, and a great sprawling hand closed down on the hen's head.

The poor prisoner was in a bad fix. While the Indian held her head in his strong grasp, Pierre pulled and jerked her legs till it looked as if

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each would share the prize. Then, all of a sudden, Pierre gave a quick downward jerk and saved her life. And now to save his own life, if possible.

Pierre was wiry and muscular and thoroughly familiar with the tricks of the red men. Lightly he rolled to his feet while the Indian, half stupefied with fire-water, staggered back for a leap.

There was a lively sprinting match across the orchard. Pierre was in the lead, with the hen squawking in his hand, and the Indian close at his heels. He knew every foot of the orchard by heart. He dodged here and there among the trees, purposely leading his pursuer over a crooked trail, where the branches grew the thickest and hung the lowest.

At last they reached the fort entrance. Pierre was almost breathless. The hen was still squawking and cackling, and the Indian had his hand out to grasp her.

The guard saw them coming. He grabbed Pierre by the shoulder and threw him and the hen into the fort, just in time to escape the tomahawk that came flying through the air after them.



Pierre gave a jerk and saved the hen's life
And now to save his own!

A Race with an Indian

Pierre found the basket of chickens and tied one end of a buckskin string to the handle, and the other end to the old hen's leg; and then he lay down on the floor in front of them, with his head on a projecting log, all ready to finish his rudely interrupted sleep.

And why not? There was nothing else that he could do while it was so dark. He had saved his hen and chickens, and that was about as much as a boy could do, with painted Indians and tomahawks and scalping knives all about.

Of course the Indians were still whooping and yelling and making all sorts of noises; but Pierre knew that the guns of the fort were all ready to fire if the red men came within range, and he could hear the watchful sentinels pacing back and forth before the gates. What was the use of being afraid, he thought. There was time enough for that when something worth while did happen.

Chapter Two

The Snook Hole

"QUIT," Pierre mumbled. "Is that you, Polly? Go on away an' let me alone. I'm sleepy," and he threw out his hand in self-defense. "Stop, I tell you. Can't you let a feller be? 'Tisn't time to get up yet."

A few sharp pecks among the roots of his hair roused him to his full senses, and he opened his eyes.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he exclaimed, shoving the chickens aside. "You want your breakfast, do you? Well, you tell me where it's comin' from. I'm sure I don't know."

The bright sun was shining through the loopholes, lighting the dark corners of the fort, where the different families were huddled together among their possessions.

Pierre's eyes lingered on one group after another, with an anxious expression.

"Ah! there they are, the whole bunch of 'em,"

The Snook Hole

he exclaimed. "That's Polly's curly topknot, sure enough. There isn't another one like it in the whole crowd."

Yes, they were all there — father and mother and little sister, wrapped in the familiar blankets and patchwork quilts, and all fast asleep. Everybody in the fort was sleeping soundly except Pierre and the guards. How still it seemed after the confusion and horrors of the night! Not a sound, save the regular tramp, tramp of the sentinels and the heavy breathing of the nearest sleepers. Pierre wondered what had become of the Indians.

He mounted a gunner's platform where he could look through the eastern loophole. But he could see only the extreme end of the village near the forest. No living thing was in sight. The houses had disappeared, and in their place were beds of ashes and smoldering brands. He heard a step near him, and a hand rested lightly on his shoulder. "Well, Pierre, how does it look?"

"Oh, dad, it looks bad enough. Everything is all wiped out. I wonder if our house is gone too."

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"Come on with me and we'll soon find out."

The next loophole gave a good view of the orchard and the corncrib and also of the dormer window in the roof of the little house beyond.

"We're all right, dad," cried Pierre in relief. "Let's go home. The chickens are hungry."

"Better wait awhile," was the cautious reply of the guard. "You can never be quite sure of anything when the treacherous imps are around. 'Twouldn't surprise me one bit if there were some of them in your house this very minute waiting to get a chance at your scalp. Better take my advice and stay where you are, my boy."

"I believe he's right, Pierre. We'll wait a little while before we risk it. Come on with me. Mother's got something to eat over there in the corner, and the chickens can wait."

Later a party of scouts was sent out from the fort. They made a thorough search; but not an Indian could they find, either in the village or in the surrounding forest.

There were many sad hearts when they returned, bringing the dead and wounded with them. Pierre hurried anxiously from one stretcher

The Snook Hole

to another in search of his chum, but Paul was not among them.

"I'll bet he's in the snook hole, safe and sound," he whispered in his mother's ear.

As might have been expected, Pierre was the first to leave the fort. With the basket of chickens in one hand and the old hen's legs clutched tightly in the other, he started on a run for the corncrib, where his hungry flock was soon scratching and picking as if nothing had happened.

"And now for the snook hole," he said. "If Paul isn't there, I've got to find him."

The snook hole had once been a bear's den, but the bears had deserted it long ago, when the first settlers had come to live near the fort. It was a snug cave underneath the tangled roots of an old pine stump that stood near the bank of a creek. The entrance was through a hole in the top of the stump. Pierre and Paul had accidentally found it one day when they were playing "explorigators," as they called themselves.

"Let's fix it up for a snook hole, and then we can hide in it some time when the Indians get after us," Paul had said.

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This had been an easy task. Cedar boughs and blankets for beds, a jug of water and dried meat for food, had made the place ready for a short siege at any time.

The noisy creek started somewhere away out in the forest and ran swiftly along between the high banks until it reached the river. The blind trail that led to the snook hole followed the narrow graveled shore.

None but a brave and loyal boy would have ventured out to find another at such a time; but Pierre was a brave boy and loyal, and Paul, the only lad in the village near his own age, was his friend.

The horrors of the past night were still fresh in his mind, and he pulled his knitted skullcap down over his ears before he started. Somehow he felt safer with his scalp under cover.

The forest was dark. There was a rustling of leaves in the tree tops overhead, where the birds were fluttering, and there was a crackling and snapping of brush and twigs all round him, where the shy little wood folk were trying to keep out of his sight.

He could smell fragrant spruce gum, but there

The Snook Hole

was no time to hunt for it now. Paul was missing, and he must find him.

"I'll have to keep a good watch out now for a while," he whispered. "When I get on the blind trail, where I can see both ways, I'll be all right."

Pierre had very little book knowledge, for the reason that there were no schools in the fort-village nor anywhere near it; but he knew a great deal about woodcraft and nature, for his hunter-father had taught him, and he could read signs and follow trails almost as well as the most experienced Indian scout.

He dodged here and there among the tree trunks, pausing to look and listen with every step, whispering to himself at the same time. Pierre always whispered to himself when he was alone.

"Hark! what's that?" He stooped down, with his ear near the ground, and listened. "It sounds like people talking. I can't tell where they are. It seems to come from every direction. I bet I've run right into a whole tribe of Indians."

He did not stop to make any further investi-

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gations. The branches of a tree near him grew close to the ground, and in a very short time he had found a safe hiding place away up where the birds were nesting.

But even there he could still hear the voices, talking, talking continually, in the same low, even, murmuring tones. After listening carefully for a short time he shook his head and scowled, and a sheepish expression crept over his face.

"What a stupid fool I am!" he exclaimed. "It's only the creek. It always makes that noise. I forgot about it. And it isn't far away either, by the sounds."

Once in the open stretch of sunlight on the edge of the noisy stream, with the damp, slippery pebbles sliding from under his feet, he rushed recklessly along over the blind trail, heedless of danger in his eagerness to reach the snook hole and Paul.

The high banks on each side of the creek were covered with a tangled mass of vines and foliage. Here and there an uprooted tree reached out over the water, and little streams from overflowing springs made miniature cataracts as they came tumbling down.



A deer, panting and dripping, climbed the
opposite bank

The Snook Hole

"Here goes," he exclaimed, taking a long flying leap over a log that crossed the trail.

At the same instant there was a splash in the water, and a deer, panting and dripping, climbed the opposite bank and disappeared.

"Ginger! that was a dandy shot. If dad had been here with his rifle, we'd have fresh venison for supper, sure thing."

And now Pierre began to take notice. He was nearing his goal. Here were the twin spruce trees that hung out over the water. Yonder was the big red stone half sunken in the sand, and just beyond the stone was the snook hole.

"I've got to go easy now," he whispered, as he parted the vines on the steep bank that covered an opening in the cave, and whistled softly. "I just wonder if Paul is in there," and he repeated the whistle. But there was no response.

"Well, I've got to find him, an' that's all there is about it. I'll go round to the front door and try."

The front door was in the top of the hollow stump. The Indians had come very close to it. Their camp fires were still smoldering, and the

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remnants of their feast were scattered about the bottom of the stump. Ham bones and corn-bread crumbs and apple cores told Pierre the whole story.

Fearfully he kept out of sight among the bushes, and listened and listened, and watched and waited for several minutes, but nothing happened. At last he grew impatient and began to grumble.

"This won't do at all," he said. "I've got to find Paul. There's no danger now. They've had their feast and have gone on to cut up their tricks somewhere else. I wonder if Paul's in the cave. I'm going to find out."

He drew near the stump and gave the signal whistle, low at first and then louder. Again and again he repeated it.

A nighthawk flew out of the hole in the top of the stump. Pierre's eyes bulged, and he hastily drew back among the bushes.

"Nighthawks don't fly in the daytime if they aren't scairt," he said. "I wonder what scairt it. Mebby there's an Indian in there, after all. I'll wait an' see," and he drew his cap down over his ears again.

The Snook Hole

He waited impatiently for a few moments, and so did the nighthawk, who sat hunched up on a limb and snapped his half-open bill viciously. At last Pierre ventured another low whistle. A frowsy head and a pair of red-rimmed eyes appeared above the top of the stump.

Pierre flipped a bit of bark, and the head disappeared. Then the whistle signals were exchanged, and Pierre climbed to the top of the stump.

"What's the matter, scairty? What are you afraid of? Get out of there an' come on. Let's go home."

And then Pierre thought of what had happened. Paul had no home. His father's house was burned. But why tell him the sad story just now. He'd had his share of it already. Better wait awhile, he thought.

"Come on home with me, Paul," he said. "Your folks are all goin' to eat dinner at our house today."

Chapter Three

Settled with Succotash

"LET'S go an' have some fun, Pierre," said Paul one day when the fort had settled down again into peaceful ways. "Come on down to the river. Old Granny's crowd are camped down there — Wabeno an' a whole drove of squaws an' papooses. We'll take some of the molasses candy with us. It's too soft. Mebby we can trade it off for a bow and arrows. An' then you just watch out for fun."

"You boys better be careful," said Uncle Jerry. "Keep away from the Indians entirely. Don't bother 'em. We've had enough trouble with 'em already."

"But these are our Indians, dad," Pierre explained. "There's no one but Old Granny an' her crowd. They're all right."

"I don't know about that, Pierre," and Uncle Jerry shook his head slowly, as if in doubt. "The village Indians are getting uneasy

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about something or other. Major Gladstone is watching them pretty close just now, an' the soldiers are putting in all their spare time strengthenin' the stockade an' gatherin' in supplies of firewood an' provisions, so as to be prepared for the worst in case of a siege."

"Oh, we'll be careful, dad. We'll just go down an' walk round the camp an' see what they're doin'. We won't get into any trouble."

Before they started they wrapped some small pieces of the sticky molasses candy in squares of thin birch bark and put them in their pockets.

Paul sniffed and snuffed as they drew near the camp. "Whew!" he exclaimed. "Granny's cookin' succotash. Do you smell it? I wonder if she'll give us any." When Granny was in a good humor she always treated her young visitors to succotash.

The huge brass kettle hung from a pole over the camp fire, and Old Granny was busy stirring its contents with a wooden spoon. She gave the boys a chilly welcome, not even the customary "Boo-joo."

"Something's up, sure enough," Pierre whispered. "She never acted like that before. I

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guess dad's right about it. Let's look around awhile, an' mebbly she'll get over her mad."

Wabeno, Granny's son, sat on a log near the water, scraping and polishing a long hickory bow. Leaning against the log were several arrows. Some were ready for use, flint-pointed and feathered; others were still in the rough.

Wabeno paid no attention whatever to the boys, but kept his eyes on his work while they remained near him.

Scattered about among the trees and along the shore were a score or more of tawny papooses and half-grown Indian children — some crawling in the sand or wading in the water, others playing games and laughing and shouting and tumbling over each other. Here and there, in the shadiest places, the tiniest papooses, strapped in their tickenawguns, were hanging from the lower branches of the trees, where the gentle breezes could rock them to sleep.

The squaws, both young and old, were seated on the ground near the group of wigwams. Some were weaving splint baskets, corn-husk mats, and rush rugs; others were embroidering



Wabeno sat on a log, scraping and polishing
a long hickory bow

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their deerskin moccasins and narrow broad-cloth skirts and leggings with colored glass beads and porcupine quills. Everyone was busy. Old Granny allowed no idlers in her camp.

"Say, Pierre," Paul whispered, casting a side-wise glance at Wabeno, "that bow looks good to me. It's just what I want. I wonder what he'll take for it."

"He won't take nothin' for it. I don't believe he'll even talk to us. He's mad about something, an' you better be careful."

"Well, I'm goin' to try him, anyway. There's a big woodchuck in our orchard, an' that bow'll be just the thing to fix him."

"You can talk to him if you want to," Pierre replied, "but I'll not run any chance. You remember what dad said. I'm going back."

The bow was finished. It was long and strong and slender, and as smooth as ivory. Paul's eyes sparkled as he watched Wabeno bend it to a proper curve and test it with the twisted buckskin string. "Isn't she a beauty, Pierre!" he exclaimed.

Pierre did not hear him. He was some distance from the camp, trying to make friends

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with the half-grown Indian children. Paul must make the bargain alone, if he made it at all. Pierre would not help him.

But Paul had made up his mind to own that bow, however great the risk might be. The crisis came when Wabeno rose to his feet and began to gather up the scattered arrows. Now was the time, Paul thought.

At first it was rather uphill work. His friendly "Boo-joo" was acknowledged in a surly tone of voice; but even this was a concession on the part of Wabeno, and it gave Paul courage to make another effort.

He pointed to the bow and asked the same questions that he had heard the fur-traders ask when dealing with the Indians. "What for? How much?"

"Cocoosh," was the reply; and Wabeno held his hands about six inches apart to show the size of the piece of pork he wanted in exchange for the bow and arrows.

Paul started on a run toward the storehouse, where his father kept his stock of traders' supplies.

"I must hurry up," he thought, "before he

Settled with Succotash

gets sick of the bargain. I wish I had more of the candy for boot. But Pierre's got a lot. I can get some if I need it."

In a surprisingly short time he was speeding back again with the dripping pork in his hands.

Wabeno looked at the pork and shook his head. He was not satisfied. The piece was not large enough.

This was just what Paul had expected. He had traded with Old Granny's tribe before. They were never quite satisfied with a bargain. They always clamored for more.

Paul argued, and Wabeno protested. Paul placed the pork on the ground by Wabeno's side and reached his hand out to take the bow. Wabeno gave the pork a kick and put his foot on the bow. "Wough!" he exclaimed. "Ka-win, Nish-e-shin."

There was an ugly expression on his face, which threatened danger and settled the bargain for the time.

"I'll try him on another tack," Paul muttered. "All he wants is boot. This is where the candy'll come in."

He grabbed the pork and started out to find

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Pierre. Pierre was still in the midst of the noisy crowd of Indian children, who were trying to imitate his double somersaults and long leaps over a broad stump.

"Hurry up, Pierre," said Paul. "Give me some more of the candy; quick. Wabeno's mad an' backed out of the bargain, but I'm goin' to have that bow, anyhow."

"You better be careful, Paul. Remember what dad said."

"Ah, hush up, will you? Give it here. It's mine as much as it is yours. Give me my share."

"Take the whole thing, for all I care. I don't want it. I'm not goin' to get in any row. Here, take it an' do what you like with it," and Pierre turned his pockets inside out, spilling the pieces of candy on the top of a stump.

Paul stripped the bark from one piece and then ran back to the camp, followed by the noisy crowd.

Again he placed the pork on the ground by Wabeno's side, and began to suck the piece of candy. The papooses drew near and watched him, smacking their lips and working their

Settled with Succotash

fingers nervously. Old Granny also grew interested and almost forgot to stir the succotash. But Wabeno paid no attention to what was taking place. He kept right on sharpening one of the arrows that was not yet to his liking.

Again it was time for business, Paul thought, and he took another piece of the candy and gave it to the nearest papoose.

In a moment half a dozen little brown hands were stretched out, and half a dozen voices were jabbering something which would be difficult to translate. Although Paul could not understand what they were saying, he knew what they meant. There was no mistaking that. "Give me some." "An' me too." "An' me too."

And then Paul placed a large pile of the candy on the ground beside the pork and waited for Wabeno's final decision. When he grunted and nodded his head, Paul knew that the bargain was closed and that the bow was his.

Now if he had taken his bow and arrows and left the camp, there would have been no trouble; but instead of doing this, he gave each of the little ones a piece of the candy and then waited to "see the fun," as he said to himself.

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They poked the candy into their mouths without removing the bark wrappers, and began to chew it. But their strong white teeth were soon fastened in the sticky stuff, and no matter how hard they tried they could not move their jaws. The molasses trickled down the corners of their mouths, and their eyes bulged with surprise.

Wabeno stood perfectly still and watched them, casting an occasional threatening glance at Paul, who was laughing and shouting and dancing about among the trees.

It really was a funny sight. The little fellows were all dressed alike in one short garment of bright flowered calico. They were surprised and helpless. Their plump brown faces were wrinkled and twisted in their desperate efforts to loosen their teeth from the treacherous candy.

Old Granny was scowling and muttering and stirring the succotash vigorously. The expression on Wabeno's face was growing more and more ominous. He walked slowly toward the camp fire and said something to Granny.

A chorus of screams from the papooses, who had at last managed to open their mouths, and

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a succession of tantalizing shouts from Paul at the same time, led to the climax.

Old Granny hastily scooped up a tin cupful of the hot succotash. Wabeno snatched it from her hand and started after Paul. Two young braves rushed out of one of the wigwams and joined in the race, whooping and yelling with every step.

Paul ran fast, but Wabeno ran faster and soon overtook him. Roughly he twirled Paul around and hurled the cup.

The succotash was still very hot when it splashed in Paul's face and eyes. He ran about wildly, screaming with pain and half blinded, while Wabeno and his companions returned to the camp, laughing heartily at the boy's defeat.

Pierre heard the commotion, and so did Uncle Jerry. They both came out and met Paul, brushed the succotash from his face, and led him to the house.

"Scraped raw potato is the very best thing that I know of for a burn like that," said Aunt Betsy, and she hurriedly prepared the poultice and applied it to the blistered face.

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"An' this is what you call 'having fun,' is it, Paul?" asked Uncle Jerry. "'Tisn't just right to twit a feller when he's down an' out, but you remember what I told you about meddling with 'em. Never mind, though. There's nothin' like experience. You've had your dose, an' you'll know better next time."

Chapter Four

Hunting Swan

"OH, SHUCKS!" Paul exclaimed, as he gave the ax a vigorous swing that left it quivering in the heart of the hickory block which he was splitting for oven wood. "Let's do something worth while, Pierre. I'm tired of hanging round the house all the time, doin' nothin' but cut wood an' feed pigs an' things. Let's get out an' go somewhere."

"All right," Pierre replied. "I'm just as tired of doin' nothin' as anybody else. But what is there to do, with the ground all under snow, an' the river all under ice?"

Paul jumped on top of the block and pointed his finger toward the river.

"Listen to that," he said, "an' then ask such a fool question. I could tell you pretty quick what we could do, if they'd only let us."

The winter in the lake-land country had been long and cold. It was growing warmer now;

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but the river was still frozen solid from shore to shore, and the ground was covered with well-packed snow.

The hint of spring in the air that came with the bright sunshine and the warm south wind, had made the boys uneasy; and now, as if to add to their restlessness, the swans and geese and other migrating waterfowl had come back from their winter homes in the South and were squawking and screeching in the air holes along the river.

"They're sassin' us, Paul, sure enough. They're daring us to come out an' shoot 'em," and Pierre took his homemade turkey caller out of his pocket and began to answer them in their own language.

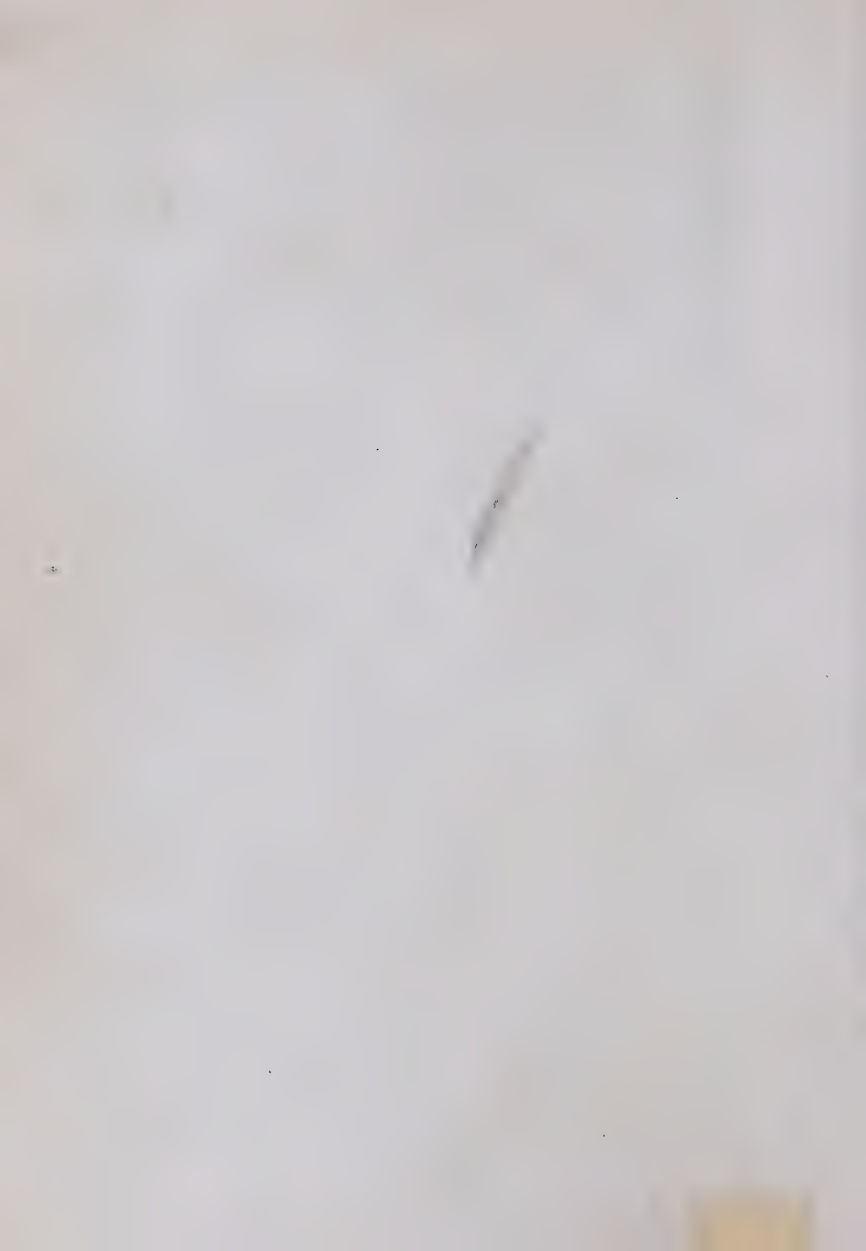
"What's to hinder us from goin' out an' gettin' some of 'em, Pierre? We haven't had any to eat for a long time. I can go if you can. Nobody kicks when I go with you."

"I don't know what dad'll think about it. But you wait, an' I'll go an' ask him."

Uncle Jerry was sitting in the chimney corner, nursing a rheumatic knee. He had cast a longing look at the old musket hanging from the



The two boys strapped their snowshoes on their feet and started out



Hunting Swan

antlers over the fireplace when he first heard the familiar cries of the waterfowl rising from the air holes, and had slowly shaken his head. For the first time in his long active pioneer life he could not respond to their calls.

"No," he said to himself. "You've caught me this time. There's no use thinking about it. I can't go out there with this game leg. That's certain."

Out on the river the swans and geese were noisily quarreling over a snarl of seaweed, just as Pierre opened the door.

"Do you hear 'em, dad?" he shouted. "The air holes are just crowded with 'em, an' Paul wants me to go out with him an' get some. How'll it be? Can I?"

His bow and plumed arrows hung from the antlers over the musket. In an instant they were in his hand, and he stood waiting by his father's side.

"Say Yes, dad," he pleaded. "We're all so tired of salt pork and dried venison. Just think of roast goose and swan, and say Yes."

After a thoughtful pause Uncle Jerry nodded his head. "Yes, boy, you may go. But take no

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risks. The ice will be getting soft now, and you may get caught if you are not careful. Remember that recklessness does not spell bravery. If you cannot get home before dark, don't try it. Go on to Leon's cabin and stay till morning."

The two boys stuffed their pockets with johnnycakes, strapped their snowshoes on their feet, and started out. It was a perfect morning, with the bright sun in a cloudless sky overhead, and the snow crisp and level underfoot.

"Let's not try for anything till we get up to the island," said Pierre. "There's always lots of swans up there, an' they're better eating, anyway, than geese."

"All right," shouted Paul. "Hurrah! for the Snow Mountains. Come on!" and away they flew down the lane that led to the river.

The strong north winds had swept the frozen river and piled the snow in huge drifts for several miles along the shore. The two "explorigators" had discovered this new feature of the landscape earlier in the season and had given it a suitable name.

They had explored the drifts from one end to the other and had discovered high mountain

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peaks with level valleys between. They had also found gorges and cañons and dark caves, where wild animals sought shelter when storms were raging. So they had called this wonderful range the Snow Mountains.

And now their glad shouts rang out through the great silence of the white hillocks as they leaped from valley to peak and from peak to valley. Occasionally the pointed snowshoes caught under the crust and sent them tumbling, head over heels, into a gulch or cave.

At last they reached a large air hole between the shore and an island lying close to the bank. It was filled with a flock of noisy, squawking swans.

"Jiminy!" Pierre shouted. "Look at the swans, will you? Let's scrooch, so they won't see us."

They managed to hide behind a snow bank without being discovered.

"They're a fine lot," said Paul. "It seems a shame to kill 'em, doesn't it? Well, mebbly it is, but we've got to eat as well as they. We eat swans, an' swans eat the big fish, an' the big fish eat the little fish, an' the little fish eat flies,

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an' — well — I don't just know what the flies eat. So I guess it's all right for us to shoot 'em, isn't it, Pierre?"

"Of course it is. We'll only shoot one apiece. That'll be all we can carry home. Watch out, now, an' see me hit that big white fellow with the double crook in his neck."

"An' watch me spat the big gray one just behind him."

They knelt on the ice, side by side, stretched the bowstrings to the extreme limit, and aimed carefully. Two long plumed arrows whizzed through the air, just above the ice.

In an instant the air holes were deserted, and the swans were seeking shelter in the tall trees that grew on the island, leaving two of their number floating on the water, limp and lifeless.

"That's the stuff!" exclaimed Paul. "Come on, now. Let's haul 'em out of the water before the current carries them under the ice."

There were plenty of long poles and forked sticks on the shore of the island, which was a favorite haunt of hunters and trappers, and the two swans were soon landed safely on the solid ice.

Hunting Swan

Paul was very much excited. It was the first time he had killed so large a bird with an arrow, and naturally he felt proud of his success. He straightened the wings out to their full size, smoothed the rumpled feathers, and then lifted the swans by their long black legs to test their weight.

"Aren't they beauties, Pierre?" he asked. "But, say, what are we going to do with 'em? We don't want to go back home yet till we strike something else; an' if we leave 'em lying here so near the air hole, the mink'll get 'em."

"Oh, we can fix that all right," Pierre replied. "We'll make a cache, as the trappers do. We'll hide 'em in a snow cave an' cover 'em with slabs of ice. I bet poor old dad'll be glad when he sees 'em. It breaks him all up when he hears 'em squawkin' an' can't get out to shoot 'em."

The cache was a great success. When it was finished, not so much as a feather could be seen.

"We'll go on now," Pierre said, as he crawled out of the dark snow cave. "We might as well have all the fun that's comin' to us, after bein' shut in so long. An' dad won't expect us tonight, anyway."

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"All right," was the reply; "but let's watch out for mink now. They won't be so heavy to carry, an' we can trade the skins for blankets an' things."

"You'll have to quit your yellin' an' make less noise if we try for mink. They aren't so easy fooled as the swans, I can tell you."

There were fresh tracks of different sizes and shapes leading from all directions toward the air hole. Not far away, a grove of stunted cedars made a fine place to hide.

The young hunters made a blind, or screen, of the branches and ate their lunch behind it while they were waiting for the mink to appear.

For a time it seemed as if they would never come. Stiffer and stiffer grew Paul in his cramped position, for Pierre had warned him not to stir beyond the cedars. Their eyes grew tired watching, but not a sign of mink in all the stretch of snow.

"Watch out!" whispered Paul suddenly. "There he comes."

A little brown furry creature stuck his pointed nose out of a hole in a snow bank. His sharp eyes glistened, and his delicate nostrils quivered.

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There were no danger signals within his sight or scent, and he started toward the air hole. He moved slowly and cautiously, keeping well in the shadows of the rough ice. Pierre nudged Paul and whispered: "Don't move. They always go in pairs. Wait till his mate comes out, an' then there'll be a chance for both of us."

Pierre was familiar with the habits of all the wild creatures along the waterways, and Paul always followed his advice when they were hunting. They waited in silence for a few moments, when a second mink appeared and followed the first. The arrows whizzed after them with a deadly aim.

"We'll stay right here till we get as many as we can carry home," Pierre said. "An' then we'll go on. Dad doesn't think it's right to kill more'n we can use, just for the fun of shootin' them."

It was hungry time for the little water beasts. Mink, otter, muskrat, and many other animals came out of their holes in search of food. The boys could see them crawling over the ice in different directions. Occasionally one came near the blind, when a well-aimed arrow would silently speed through the air and check its course.

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At last Pierre decided to leave the blind, and Paul followed him without questioning.

"We've got enough, now," he said. "We'll make another cache an' leave 'em all here till we come back. It's a long way to Leon's cabin, an' we've got to get there before dark."

But to the boys' surprise, when they resumed the journey, walking was difficult. So engrossed had they been with their sport that, in the shelter of the cedars, they had not noticed how warm the air had turned. Although the ground was covered with snow, and the river with ice, the sun had been growing very hot. Little streams of water began to trickle down the sides of the Snow Mountains, and the shore ice was becoming spongy. The heat was oppressive, and snowshoeing under such conditions was rather tedious.

"If it keeps on thawing like this we'll soon need a boat instead of snowshoes," Pierre remarked.

"Well, you just bet I'm tired," growled Paul. "But I s'pose we've got to make the cabin now we've got so far, or sleep in a snow bank."

"Oh, we'll make the cabin all right. We've

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just got to keep on going till we do make it, that's all. Keep moving, and we'll get there."

The Snow Mountains were growing smaller, and the little streams of water that trickled down their sides were growing larger. The shore ice was steaming under the hot sun and breaking loose from its winter moorings.

At last the snow became so soft and slushy, and the streams of water so broad and deep, that further progress on the snowshoes became impossible. It was much easier for the boys to carry them on their backs. They were tired and hungry. Their clothing was soaked with snow water. The shoepacs, or moccasins, on their feet were wet and cold, and it was growing dark.

"Shucks! do you call this fun?" Paul grumbled. "How much further have we got to go?"

"Ah, don't play baby. Brace up, Bub." This was Pierre's pet name for his companion, who was younger and not nearly so strong or so brave as Pierre was. "Stop your growling. We'll soon be there now. Do you see that tall pine tree near the shore, away up there in the bend? Well, Leon's cabin stands in its shadow. Come on, now; brace up."

Chapter Five

Angélique

LEON was a half-breed Indian trapper and voyageur, one who traveled far over the waterways. His wife, Marie, was the daughter of an Ottawa Indian chief.

Their new cabin stood near the shore where the lake narrowed and formed the head of the river. Leon had been a long time building it, but it was all finished now. Every crack and crevice between the logs was well plastered with clay. There were a real fireplace and a chimney, bunks in the corners for beds, and rough benches for seats. Altogether, it was a grand house. Outside of the fort-village, there was nothing that equaled it in all the lake-land region.

Angélique, the little daughter, was very proud of her new home. It was so much better than the old bark-covered wigwam, with the fire on the ground in the center and a hole in the peak for the smoke to escape.

Angélique

It was midday, and the sun was shining brightly over lake and river. The huge cakes of ice that had floated down from the lakes farther north, had been crowding and grinding each other all the day before; but during the past night they had become wedged together into a solid mass, and now both lake and river were white and still.

Angélique stood near the cabin door and held one end of the bark rope that was tied around Ko-ko's neck, while her father was loading the sled with pine boughs.

Ko-ko was a typical Indian dog, of no particular color and of a mongrel breed. His ears were sharp and pointed, his nose turned up, and his tail was so long that it grazed the ground when it got out of curl, which often happened when he was in a bad temper. Although he had no special claim on beauty, taken altogether he was a remarkable dog in many ways and a very valuable member of Leon's family.

When the boughs were all piled on the sled, Angélique placed the rope in her father's hand and told Ko-ko to go with him. Instead of doing this, Ko-ko turned around and looked at

Moccasined Feet

the sled, braced his feet, straightened his tail, and stubbornly refused to move.

Although the load was not heavy, it was large, and Ko-ko felt insulted at being asked to pull it; but when Angélique coaxed him and patted his head and ran in front of him for a short distance, his tail took on an extra curl, and he started on a trot down the path that led to the river.

Angélique watched her father and the dog as they went out on the ice, climbing the white hillocks and circling the air holes; and all along their course Leon was thrusting the pine boughs into the crevices, leaving behind him a zigzag line of dark-green spots that marked a smooth and safe trail to the opposite shore.

"I'm so glad the trail is made," said Angélique. "Now Leon can go across and get some of the turkeys we heard gobbling over there, and Marie can easily go to the fort."

Angélique spoke only in her native tongue, of course, and she had been taught to call her father and mother by their real names, Leon and Marie.

Everybody in the little cabin was busy long

Angélique

before daylight the next morning. Leon fastened his powder flask to his belt, filled his pocket with bullets, and, with his musket on his shoulder, started out over the trail. And when the sun threw the shadow of the tall pine tree across the red mark on the doorsill, Marie must be ready to start on her annual journey to the fort-village.

The village was many miles south of the cabin; but Marie would not be lonely, for all the grown people of the tribe to which she belonged were to meet there. Many of them would join her and follow the same trail along the river shore.

This journey was a great event in the little Indian mother's quiet life. It was at this season of the year that the agents of the new government held their annual reception for the several tribes of Indians in that region, and gave them presents of blankets, cloth, beads, knives, and other trinkets as part payment for the lands that had been taken away from them.

Since Marie would not return home until the following night she must prepare food to take on her journey, and some for Angélique and Leon.

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She placed the huge loaf of corn bread in the covered bake-kettle and buried it under a mound of live coals and hot ashes. The succotash was soon bubbling in the brass kettle which hung from the iron crane in the fireplace, and the ham of dried venison was sliced and rolled in a sheet of birch bark to keep it moist. And then Marie began to dress for her journey.

Although Leon and his family had deserted the Indian wigwam for the more comfortable cabin of the white man, they still wore the regular Indian costume.

Marie's best buckskin moccasins were decorated with colored porcupine quills, and her blue-broadcloth petticoat and leggings were embroidered with beads of all colors. Over these she wore a red and green calico short gown drawn in at the waist with a bright-red woolen sash. Angélique tied the long strings of glass beads round her mother's neck, fastened the hoop earrings of yellow brass in her ears, and spread out the white woolen blanket which she wore over her head.

When the shadow of the tall pine tree reached the doorsill, Marie started on the trail to the

Angélique

fort, leaving Angélique and Ko-ko alone to guard the house.

The woodpile by the chimney corner was low, but there were pine knots heavy with pitch scattered about among the fallen trees. Angélique fastened Ko-ko to the sled and went out after them.

All the long afternoon she gathered them in her apron and carried them into the cabin. When it grew dark she drew in the latchstring and sat down in her basket chair before the fire, with the dog by her side, until she was sleepy. Then she covered Ko-ko with the bearskin rug and crawled into her bunk.

The morning brought the bright sun and the soft south wind. Angélique shared her breakfast with her companion, and then they went down to the river shore. She shaded her eyes with her hands and looked out on the trail, hoping she might see her father; for then she would hitch Ko-ko to the sled, and they would go out to meet him and help him to bring the turkeys home. But the sun nearly blinded her, and the shore ice was soft and spongy, and her father was not in sight.

Moccasined Feet

She returned to the cabin and began to weave a pretty basket from the narrow strips of colored bark which her mother had prepared for her. She became so interested in her work that she forgot to eat until Ko-ko began to coax her for his dinner.

The basket grew as the hours passed by, until the sun slid behind the trees, and Angélique could no longer distinguish the colors.

Then she lay back in her chair and set her mind at work, picturing the presents her mother was bringing home to her. She surely would bring beads. They always came with the woolen blankets. She hoped there would be gold-colored ones among them. Gold-colored beads made her think of sunshine on cloudy days. Perhaps there would be earrings. Marie had promised her the very next pair that came.

The dog began to move uneasily about the room. When she talked to him and patted his head he sank down by her feet; but he soon grew restless again, and when she tried to quiet him a second time he threw his head back on his shoulders and began to howl. She opened the door, and away he rushed toward the river.

Angélique

"Leon must be coming," she exclaimed, and, throwing her blanket over her head, she followed the dog.

"But where is the trail?" she asked herself. It could not be the darkness that prevented her from seeing it, for she could see the trees on the opposite shore very distinctly.

"Somebody must have moved the bushes," she said. "This morning they were opposite the path, and now they are way down by the pine tree."

Puzzled, she walked along the shore, trying to make up her mind just how it all had happened. There was something strange about the river too. It looked as though it were going to crack.

Suddenly she heard a noise directly in front of her, and the next minute she saw great cakes of ice, standing on end, come crowding and crushing up through the air holes. There was a cracking and snapping of ice in every direction, and in a very short time the whole river was slowly moving southward. The trail moved with it, and the bushes became more and more scattered as the cakes of ice broke into smaller pieces.

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Ko-ko climbed to the ridge of the shore ice and, with his nose pointed skyward, howled so long and so loud that Angélique was frightened.

Suddenly she dropped the blanket from her shoulders and listened. She thought she heard the sound of a voice above the medley of sound that filled the air.

The crashing and grinding of the moving ice, the squawking and screeching of the disturbed waterfowl as they rose from the ruined air holes, together with the continued howling of the dog, were almost deafening. But above all the tumult and confusion Angélique could still hear the voice, as if calling, and each time it sounded nearer.

Ko-ko heard it also. He stopped howling and began to bark; and before Angélique could stop him he ran out on the ice, jumping from cake to cake in a reckless manner, until she could no longer see him.

The cry grew louder and louder, and at last she could distinguish the syllables of her own name.

"An — gé — lique!" sounded above the crashing and roaring of the ice. She made a trumpet

Angélique

of her two hands and called back as loud as she could, "Le — e — on! Le — e — on!"

Again she heard the voice very distinctly, this time farther down the river. "An — gé — lique! An — gé — lique, bring the canoe."

Angélique ran as swiftly as possible to the ravine near the pine tree, dragged the canoe by its rope from its hiding place, and pulled it after her, straight on to the moving ice. She did not stop to consider what she must do or how she could do it; her father was calling her, and she must go to him.

Two weary, bedraggled, hungry boys were nearing the pine tree just as she started.

"Hark! what's that?" asked Paul, grasping Pierre's hand.

"Oh, don't be afraid, Bubby. That's nothin' but the ice cracking out yonder in the river. The hot sun's been too much for it today," and Pierre gave Paul a shove and began to whistle a lively air.

"But listen, Pierre. I hear someone calling an' a dog barking."

"Well, what if you do? There's no harm in

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that, is there? Don't be a scairty cat. Brace up. Here we are, right under Leon's pine tree. Let's rest a bit, an' then we'll go on to the cabin."

At first the moving ice made Angélique dizzy; but she bravely clung to the rope, dragging the canoe behind her as she jumped from one floating cake of ice to another, and all the time she kept giving cheerful replies to the repeated calls that she heard.

At last she could see two dark objects close together and could hear Ko-ko's quick, sharp bark and the encouraging words of her father.

She ran toward him across a great cake of ice until she could go no farther.

A strip of water stretched out before her. It looked so dark and deep that it made her shiver; but when she heard her father's voice sounding so near, she grew brave again.

She launched the canoe upon the water and began to steer it across the open space. Sturdily she kept to her course through the black water till she reached the ice where Leon was waiting to catch the rope. Then she dropped the paddle

Angélique

and began to cry. But when her father threw the great brown glossy turkeys into the boat and told her to sit on them, her face brightened and she started to laugh.

When they reached the cabin, Marie was there to welcome them, and the presents were spread out on the bunk. Angélique forgot all about her perilous adventure when she saw them.

There were blue beads and red beads, green beads and yellow beads, and, to her joy, all the gold-colored beads she could wish. There were earrings too, for Marie had not forgotten her promise. Happily Angélique fastened the rings in her ears and began sorting out colors for her new necklace, while Marie hurriedly prepared one of the turkeys and hung it over the fire to cook.

Leon was cleaning his gun, and Ko-ko was watching him, when a jerk at the latchstring and a shuffling of feet outside the door announced the approach of visitors.

"Boo-joo, Leon," said Pierre. "That turkey smells good. Are you going to give us some? We're awful hungry."

Chapter Six

The Sugar-Makers

"**N**OW the spring starts out to tell its story, and the sap begins to bubble down below," Pierre sang, as he gashed the maple tree with a hatchet.

"There she comes, Paul. Hurry up, quick, with the trough."

Paul hurried up with the trough and placed it on the ground, under the gash in the tree. The sap oozed out of the jagged wound and trickled down the bark into the trough.

"Ginger!" Paul exclaimed, "I've got to have a drink of that."

"No you don't, my boy," Pierre replied. "You just wait till I get enough to make barley coffee for breakfast. But say, Paul, if sap's what you want, why don't we go up to Uncle Saint's? You know he asked us to come up as soon as the sap started to run. The ice is all gone now, an' we can go up in our canoes."

The Sugar-Makers

"All right, Pierre, let's go. I can go if you can. Let's go tomorrow."

"Well, I must go an' talk with dad before we make up our minds. I don't know what he'll think about it. You watch the sap while I'm gone, but don't play piggy and drink it all up."

"I don't know just what to think about it, Pierre," said Uncle Jerry, when the boy had run up with his eager question. "It's about time for the Indians to leave their hunting camps, an' there's no telling what sort of mood they may be in. It's a long way up there, an' there'd be no one to help you if you should have trouble with 'em."

"Oh, we'll hurry up an' get there before they strike the river, dad, an' we'll be all right then, for they're afraid of Uncle Saint."

"But what will you do if he happens to be away? You know he always comes down to the village for provisions as soon as the ice is out of the river."

"Well, if he isn't home we can stay round there an' wait till he comes back."

"Very well, you may go. But if he isn't there an' you should get into any trouble with

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the Indians, take to your canoes the first thing an' paddle down the river as fast as you can till you meet him."

Uncle Saint was a fur-trader who lived several miles north of the fort-village. He was the first and only white settler in that region. His cabin stood solitary on the edge of the forest, near a maple grove. This grove was on an elevation that had been used for ages by the Indians as a burial place for their dead; in fact, the country around Uncle Saint's was still a favorite hunting ground for several roving tribes of Indians.

Among these tribes was a band of friendly Chippewas, who came every spring during the sugar season and camped in the maple grove. The boys liked to come at this time too, for no other maple sugar tasted quite like Uncle Saint's.

There was no sign of daylight in the east when they started on their journey, and the birds were still sleeping.

Down through the quiet forest they stole to the bank of the river. The water was clear and still, save when a frightened fish leaped from its depths to escape a hungry enemy.

The Sugar-Makers

Their birch-bark canoes had been purchased from Wabeno, and could not be better; for Wabeno was recognized as a master canoe builder, as well as a master bow and arrow maker. Whatever he made in either line was considered the best. The canoes were light, but stanch and strong and perfectly balanced, with red-cedar paddles to match.

"Can we make it, Pierre?" asked Paul, looking at the long stretch of water ahead of them. "It means a whole lot of paddlin' between sunup an' sundown."

"Of course we can make it," Pierre replied emphatically. "We've just got to make it, that's all. There's no stopping place in the whole stretch, an' it's too cold to sleep outside. We'll hustle right along an' not make a stop till we have to. We'll play we're fur-traders an' eat while we paddle, an' when we aren't eating we'll sing paddle songs to make the time seem shorter. 'Tisn't like snowshoeing, Bub. We'll have the water under us till we get there. Now pitch in an' keep up your end of the business."

Daylight found them at the entrance to Otsi-Keta Lake, opposite Leon's cabin.

Moccasined Feet

"We won't try to follow the shore now," Pierre said. "There isn't a bit of wind, an' no sign of a storm. We'll put straight across till we reach the rushes, an' save a lot of time an' hard work."

The rushes were several miles away — how many the boys did not know. But it was a long hard pull, with no chance to rest.

They ate their rations of johnnycake, between the paddle strokes, as the canoemen did, and sang the rhythmical paddle songs of the fur-traders and voyageurs to lighten their labor. At last their arms grew weary, the paddles dragged in the water, and the canoes moved more slowly.

"Ginger!" exclaimed Paul. "I'm tired."

"Mebby I'm not," Pierre replied. "The sun's awful hot. Let's double up now, just for a change. It won't be so hard pulling," and they brought their canoes together, side by side, and fastened them with a system of buckskin loops and strings, which they called their harness.

"That's the stuff!" Pierre shouted. "Now we'll take it easy for a while, till we get our wind again. Then we'll make a rush for the rushes. That dark streak way ahead looks like



It was a long hard pull with no chance to rest

The Sugar-Makers

'em. And then comes the island. We'll go ashore there an' take a good snooze."

There were several channels, broad and deep, leading through the great rush meadows that spread out on every side for many miles. But Pierre knew a narrow straight cut — "Uncle Saint's cut," he called it — which was several miles shorter than any of the others and would take them directly to the island where they expected to stop.

It was a long pull; but the tall green rushes, bending down over the water on each side of the narrow channel, partly protected them from the sun and cooled the air.

Sturdily they kept on and on till they touched the broad shore of the island.

"I'm all finished," Paul muttered, as he rolled out of his canoe into the sand on the island beach. "Humpback an' crooked legs. Wonder if I'll ever straighten out."

"Of course you will," answered Pierre. "Just follow me. I'll show you how to take the kinks out."

With the long stretch of sandy beach for a sprinting track and the straight limbs of the

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beach trees for arm exercises, the boys soon recovered from the effects of their cramped positions in the narrow canoes.

The sun was on the downward slope, and Uncle Saint's cabin was still several miles distant, when they again launched their canoes and started out to battle with the swift current of the Otsi-Sippi River.

It was long after sunset when they arrived at the end of their journey.

Uncle Saint was not at home, but the latch-string was hanging outside the door.

"I suppose he's gone after something to eat, just as dad said," Pierre remarked. "But we'll be all right till he comes back. We'll finish up our rations and go straight to bed. I can sleep without rocking, I'm so tired."

So into Uncle Saint's bunk they crawled, their thoughts full of the sugar-making next day.

The boys had arrived just in time. It was the finest kind of sugar weather. The frosty nights and sunny days had set the sap in circulation all through the maple grove.

Paul and Pierre were awakened very early in the morning by the sounds of tomahawks tap-

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ping the trees and hewing out the troughs to hold the sap. The Indian sugar-makers had arrived during the night, and their wigwams were pitched along the shore for several rods.

Before midday the sap was running briskly, and everyone in the camp, except the tiniest papooses, was very busy. Some of the party cut wood and built fires under the maple trees; some gathered the sap as fast as the troughs were filled, and poured it into the large brass kettles that hung over the flames; others stirred the boiling sap, occasionally testing it by spreading small quantities on snow from the banks that still remained in the shade of the grove.

A few of the old squaws were seated on the ground near the wigwams, making mokoks of birch bark to hold the sugar when it was finished.

Pierre remembered his father's warning, and at first the boys kept out of sight. They climbed the ladder that led to the garret and watched the busy workers through the open spaces between the logs, but at last they became so interested in the proceedings that they decided to venture outside the house.

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The Indians appeared to be very friendly toward them. They gave them hot sugar to eat, and after a while allowed them to work with the Indian lads.

It was great fun for Paul and Pierre. They chopped wood, built fires, carried sap, and helped the old squaws to fill the birch-bark mokoks with the fresh maple sugar and pack the round cakes of all sizes in the splint baskets. They ate their share of succotash and dried venison with the young Indians and papooses and almost forgot they were of another race and color until night came, and even then they were too tired to think much about it.

The sugar season was unusually long, the frosty nights and warm days keeping the sap in good condition. But at last a warm spring rain started to fall, the maple buds began to swell, the sap turned bitter, and the sugar season ended. And then the Indians began making preparations to leave.

They were very generous in their treatment of the boys. They gave them a number of the small mokoks filled with the loose sugar, and a splint basket full of the little round cakes.

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They also left one of the largest mokoks on the doorstep for Uncle Saint.

While the boys were storing their sugar in the garret they heard an unusual commotion outside. A loud whooping and yelling from the direction of the river was answered by the Indians whom they had just left.

They tumbled down the ladder in a hurry, drew in the latchstring, placed the heavy oak bar across the door, and fastened the window shutter. Then they scampered back to the garret to see if they could find out what it all meant.

"Oh, Pierre, Pierre, look quick!" Paul cried, pointing toward the river.

It was indeed a terrible sight. Hundreds of canoes were approaching. A painted warrior was standing erect in the stern of each, and all were full of braves, paddling furiously.

Occasionally they stopped paddling and uttered terrific whoops, at the same time pointing to the upright poles in the bows of the canoes, to which were fastened the scalps of the enemies they had slain.

The sugar-makers met them and helped them to draw their canoes out of the water. They

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were all talking at once and gesticulating and pointing in the direction from which they had come.

Suddenly they were all silent; and then the boys saw them lift, from the bottom of the canoes, the bodies of the warriors who had been killed in battle and carry them to the burial place in the maple grove, where they were laid out on the ground, side by side.

They then began making preparations for the burial and the powwow that would follow it. Paul and Pierre were familiar with the Indian customs on such occasions, and they knew what to expect when they saw the earthen jugs of "Santa-Waba" brought into the camp.

Hour after hour the ceremony went on, and when it grew dark the boys crawled into the bunk and covered their heads with the blankets to shut out the dreadful noises made by the tipsy mourners.

During the night they were awakened many times by low, quavering voices, gradually rising to the highest possible pitch and then slowly dying away in a prolonged wail.

When they awoke the next morning not a

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sound could be heard. Through the cracks they could see the Indians gathered in a circle round the new graves, and all were fast asleep. Some were in a sitting posture, supported by stumps and logs, and some were lying on the ground in all sorts of uncomfortable positions.

They had placed large quantities of food on the graves, that the newly departed spirits of their friends might not be hungry while on their journey to the Happy Hunting Grounds. There were strips of dried venison, mokoks of sugar, dried corn, and game of all sorts beside a large jug of fire-water.

"It just makes me hungry, Pierre, to see all that stuff lying around out there," said Paul. "What have we got for breakfast, anyway?"

"There's nothin' round here that I can see but sassafras roots an' maple sugar," was the reply. "We've finished up 'most everything Uncle Saint left, by the looks of things."

"H'm! bark an' sugar don't count when a feller's as hungry as I am. Let's go out an' shoot something. There's all sorts of birds flyin' round, an' here's lots of bows an' arrows — regular dandies. Uncle Saint won't care if

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we use 'em," and Paul started for the door and began to lift the big bar from the sockets.

"Don't you do that, Paul," Pierre exclaimed. "You just stay where you are. It isn't safe to go out there yet."

"Oh, keep still. That's all right. We can kill our breakfast and eat it before they know anything about it."

When the heavy door swung open, they saw a dozen or more of the painted warriors stretched out on the ground near the path. These were aroused by the creaking of the wooden hinges. One of them, who wore an eagle's feather twisted in his plaited hair, began to mutter as he started toward them, drawing a long knife from his belt.

The boys jumped backward, closed the door, and slipped the bar in place, just as he fell against it with a gruff "Wough!"

"Oh, Pierre, what'll we do?" cried Paul, now thoroughly frightened.

"Do? Just behave yourself, that's all. You wouldn't listen to me, an' this is what you get for it. It's likely he'll go to sleep again, if you keep still."

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The boys kept very quiet, and in a short time they heard the Indian snoring again.

"I'm sorry, Pierre," Paul admitted. "I'll surely do what you say next time."

"But that doesn't help us now. We're trapped good and strong," answered Pierre.

"But we'll be all right as soon as Uncle Saint comes, won't we, Pierre? I'm so hungry. Let's cook the sassafras an' see how it goes."

"All right. We'll do it. An' we'll put some of the sugar in the water an' call it coffee."

They walked on their toes and talked in whispers while they cooked and ate their meal of roots. Then they sat down and waited for something to happen. Every once in a while one of them would put his eyes to the cracks to take a peep at the sleepers.

The hours dragged slowly by, and the Indians still slept.

The sassafras diet did not satisfy the boys' hunger. Pierre confessed to himself that he was very hungry, but he was somewhat of a philosopher, and what was the use of talking about it, he thought. It only made matters worse in every way. But with Paul it was different. He

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was hungry, and in a mild way he was growing desperate. He did not care very much what happened if he only could get something to eat.

"I've half a notion to sneak out there an' hook a piece of that venison," he said, casting a longing glance at the graves, where the meat lay scattered about.

"Don't you try it, Paul," exclaimed Pierre. "Dad says nothin' makes Indians fightin' mad so quick as to meddle with the food an' stuff that they put on their graves."

"Well, don't fly to pieces! Who's goin' to meddle with it? But it seems all nonsense for us to stay shut up like this an' starve, with all that meat lying there in plain sight, doin' nobody any good."

"Oh, stop your growling an' wait till they go. They'll leave it there, an' then we can get it."

Several more hours passed slowly by, and the Indians were still there, motionless and silent. Not a sound could be heard except the heavy breathing just outside the door. And Paul was growing hungry beyond endurance. At last he sprang to his feet and exclaimed: "I don't care what you say. I'm goin' to get out of this."

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"But how can you do it, Paul? You can't open the door while that Indian's there."

"There's more'n one way to skin a wood-chuck," Paul replied, beginning to rake the coals and ashes out of the fireplace. "We can go up the chimney."

Since the chimney was built of small sticks and clay and was broad and deep, it was an easy task to climb to the top. Paul led and Pierre followed, half smothered in the cloud of soot which came tumbling down. Paul stuck his head out of the top and looked about while Pierre was brushing the soot from his eyes.

"I'll go for the stuff, Pierre," he said. Hunger made him brave. "You slide down the roof an' make for the river, while I sneak the meat. Have the canoes all ready when I get there, an' we'll paddle down the river till we meet Uncle Saint. We'll be out of sight long before they wake up."

Pierre silently accepted Paul's plan. Under the conditions there was nothing else to do. He followed a roundabout path that led through the grove to the river, and managed to reach their canoes without disturbing the sleeping

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Indians. He had just launched them when he heard a whoop and yell that made his scalp tingle.

"He's just gone an' done it now," Pierre exclaimed. "But he would have his own way, an' now we'll pay for it."

The next moment Paul came in sight, with a large piece of meat in his hand and a painted Indian at his heels.

"Drop that meat," Pierre shouted. But Paul shook his head and kept on running. With a flying leap he gained his canoe, nor did he dare to look back until he had shot off beside Paul, clear out into the swift current.

"How did you happen to wake him up?" Pierre asked, as soon as it was safe to talk.

"Oh, he was stretched out on the ground near this hunk of meat, with his moccasins buried in the sand. I didn't see 'em when I reached out over him to pick it up, an' I must have stepped on his toes. Ginger! but didn't he yell when he was chasin' me? I thought I was gone for sure. But say, Pierre, do you think they'll come after us?"

"You can make up your mind that they'll

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try it. It's just as dad said. You touched 'em on a tender spot when you took that meat. If we'd only waited till they waked up, they'd have given us all the food we wanted; but now we can watch out for trouble."

The canoes were allowed to drift with the current, while the boys sliced the meat and filled their mouths and pockets. They had just begun to paddle in real earnest, when they saw two canoes start out from the shore.

"If we can't beat 'em we're no good," boasted Paul. "They're half asleep yet. Watch their canoes wobble an' see how crooked they go. Let's pitch in for all we're worth, Pierre, an' get round the point out of their sight."

Everything went well for a mile or more, but the boys were weak from excitement and hunger, whereas the Indians were fresh from their long sleep.

"What'll they do with us when they catch us, Pierre?" Paul's voice was trembling. When real danger threatened him, he always weakened and turned to Pierre for counsel and protection.

"Never mind what they'll do with us when they catch us. Pitch in an' keep still. They

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haven't got us yet," shouted Pierre cheeringly above the noise of the paddles.

For a short time the boys' canoes shot ahead and gained a trifle. Then their paddles moved more slowly, and the race was almost even for a mile or two.

Just at this critical point in the pursuit, another canoe rounded the point below them. The paddler was making a vigorous effort to reach the boys and was shouting something which they could not understand.

"It's no use," Pierre muttered, sinking down in the canoe, with his paddle dragging in the water. "We're trapped, an' we might as well quit right here."

Paul hurriedly harnessed the canoes together. Somehow he felt safer with Pierre near him.

"Will they scalp us, Pierre?" he asked, and his lips quivered.

Pierre shuddered, but made no reply. What could he say to encourage the frightened lad, with the enemy already within sound of his voice.

On the painted faces that drew up beside them there was a vicious expression which de-

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stroyed all hope. Paul closed his eyes when he got a glimpse of a shining blade, and became unconscious.

When he recovered, Pierre was trying to make him understand that they were safe, and Uncle Saint was throwing water in his face and talking to the Indians at the same time in a loud, angry voice.

The warriors turned their canoes round and paddled slowly back to the camp. When Uncle Saint and the boys arrived, the whole party, sugar-makers and braves, were awake and making hurried preparations to leave.

Some of the party were very angry at the boys and would have attacked them, but Uncle Saint knew how to manage angry Indians. He opened his pack of traders' supplies that he had brought from the fort-village, and distributed a few red-cotton handkerchiefs and brass nose rings and some colored beads among the chiefs as a peace offering.

In spite of the fact that Uncle Saint was lecturing them, the boys' hearts grew lighter as they watched the great fleet of canoes start out on their journey northward.

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"You are lucky to have your scalps safe under your caps, my boys. You were in great danger; an' if I hadn't heard them yelling, an' hurried around the point to see what was going on, you wouldn't be standing here now. You should have known better than to meddle with their graves. Always remember that it is best to treat an Indian as you'd like to be treated if you were an Indian yourself."

"But I was so hungry, Uncle Saint, I just couldn't help it," Paul pleaded.

Uncle Saint smiled. He gave the boys a friendly shove toward the house, and said: "Come on in an' help me open the packs. I think I've got medicines that'll cure you of that hungry feeling pretty quick."

Chapter Seven

The Fort-Village

THE fort stood in the center, and the houses reached out on each side. They stood close together and were all alike — small one-room log cabins, with a garret lighted by dormer windows tucked away under the steep roof. They all faced the river and turned their backs on the forest.

There was but one street in the fort-village, and all the front gates opened on it. It followed the curves of the river, sometimes drawing very near the water.

In front of each house was the narrow water dock, that reached out to the channel bank, where the fleet of family canoes was moored.

Uncle Jerry, as we have seen, lived in one of the houses near the fort. He had lived there for a long time, but now he had decided to move.

"Of course," he explained, "we're safe enough

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right here in the shadow of the guns. I've no complaint to make about that. But the fact is I'm gettin' tired of this everlasting noise. There's the drums an' fifes an' bugles, an' the rattle an' clashing of the bayonets, to say nothin' of the carousing of the soldiers when they're off duty. Of course they must have their fun; but I don't have to listen to it, an' I'm goin' to get out. I'm goin' to build a new house back on the hill, on the edge of the orchard."

"But, father, what about the Indians?" Aunt Betsy asked anxiously. "We'll be so far away from the fort gate that we'll all be murdered before we can get there."

"Oh, don't you worry about the Indians, mother. I got that all planned out long ago. I'm goin' to have an underground runway from the new cellar right into the fort grounds. When you hear 'em whoopin', you'll only have to gather up your family an' bundles an' light out."

The well for the new house was dug first, for the workmen would need drinking water, and the river was too far away. And then they began to dig the cellar.

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Uncle Jerry was kept so busy superintending the work that he had no time to look after things as usual. As he had not gone to the mill for some time, there was no corn meal in the kitchen to make bread.

"Pierre will have to carry some corn down to the mill an' get it ground," he said. "I can't leave just now, an' there's no one else to go."

"Do you really think it's safe for him to go alone, father?" Aunt Betsy asked. "You know it's quite a long trip, an' the Indians are so uneasy we can't tell what might happen to him. Mebby we better wait till you can go yourself."

"I'll trust him on the pony, mother. If there's no one ahead of him, so that he gets his grist in first, he'll be back before dark."

When the long sack of corn had been placed across the pony's back, Pierre mounted and started on his journey.

The mill stood on the bank of the Red River, several miles west of the village, and the trail that led to it followed the river shore nearly the whole distance.

It was a jolly outing for both lad and pony. The latter was frisky and frolicky, shying at

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shadows and cantering recklessly over logs and brooks, while Pierre shouted and sang, utterly regardless of any danger that might be awaiting him.

"Good," Pierre exclaimed, as he caught sight of the tall windmill in the distance. "I'm the first one here. The mill isn't running, so there's nobody ahead of me, an' the wind's blowin' all right."

Tugging at the big sack, he soon dismounted and carried the corn into the mill.

The miller ungeared the big wheel overhead, and the strong wind caught against the broad paddles. At first they rattled and creaked and groaned in a protesting way, and then they began to move.

The corn was poured into the hopper, the millstone grinders caught it and crushed it, and in a very short time the corn meal was in the sack, all ready for the return trip.

"We'll get home long before dark, Raggy," Pierre said, patting the pony's neck. "We'll go till we get tired, an' then we'll stop an' rest."

The pony started out briskly, now and then snatching a clump of grass or a tuft of leaves,

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but at last his tired head dropped, and he began to move more slowly.

"That tells the story. You're tired, aren't you, poor fellow?" and Pierre slid to the ground. "Well, we'll stop right here. It's as good a place as any."

He tethered the pony to a small sapling that stood in an opening among the trees where the rank grass grew thickest; and then he stretched himself out on a mat of fragrant twigs under a low-spreading pine tree, and was soon sleeping soundly.

It was lunch time for the little wood folk. A chipmunk sat on his haunches and slowly waved his striped tail to and fro. His keen, inquisitive eyes were fixed on a clump of elder bushes that leaned far out over the river bank, sprinkling the surface of the water with their creamy petals. Above them, darting and diving like a flash of rainbow-hued light, a green and purple humming bird wrangled with a loud-voiced bee which had been searching for honey too near its nest. A gaudy woodpecker swung downward from a tall tree, tapped noisily on the brown bark of a dead elm, and then flew to the top

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of a high stump with a choice morsel hanging from his beak. Beyond the long shadows that reached out to midstream, a silvered whitefish leaped from the water and swallowed a passing beetle; and a short distance away the shaggy pony, tethered to the sapling, struggled helplessly against the army of hungry deer flies that feasted on his quivering flanks.

Unconscious of the mimic warfare raging all about him, Pierre slept peacefully. His coarse braided straw hat lay by his side, and his bare head rested on the sack of corn meal. Through a small hole near the bottom of the sack, a colony of food-gathering ants were passing in and out in an endless procession.

The green and purple humming bird won the battle with the bee, and flitted on tremulous wings from flower to flower, humming contentedly, until a slight movement of the elder bushes frightened him away. The chipmunk, scenting danger, lowered his tail, and with a bound was on his feet, galloping to cover. And then very slowly, with but the faintest rustle of the leaves, the elder bushes parted, and a pair of glittering eyes, set deep in a square bronze-



The pony was frisky and frolicky, cantering
recklessly over logs and brooks

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colored face, looked out. Two scarred hands reached through the opening, grasped the largest elder stems, and were followed by the long, lithe body of an Indian.

Inch by inch, now in motion and now still, he crawled along on the ground until he reached the grass plot in the opening, and then he rose to his feet, tall and straight. His long coarse black hair was spread round his shoulders, two eagle feathers were stuck in the braided scalp lock on the top of his head, and large hoop rings of brass hung from his ears and nose.

A cautious, covetous look spread over his face as his eyes wandered from the sleeping boy to the tethered pony. He took two or three stealthy steps forward, and then sank to the ground, out of sight in the tall grass.

As noiselessly as a snake he crawled toward the pestered animal, and only the rasping chirr of a disturbed grasshopper or the wavering flight of a sleepy butterfly marked his course.

The pony, resenting the intrusion, stamped his feet and jerked the tether, and the boy moved uneasily.

For a short time the Indian remained motion-

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less; but gradually, by certain soothing movements of his hands over the wounded flanks, he managed to gain the animal's confidence, and was soon leading him out over the blazed trail through the forest.

The winds sent the whitecaps scudding across the water and shook the beech trees until the nuts were scattered over the ground beneath; they whistled and sighed among the pine needles overhead, and tangled the curly locks spread out on the corn-meal sack; and then, with a sudden wrench, they twisted a long scaly cone from its stem and sent it down, point first, into the sleeping boy's face.

"Whew! that was a stunner," Pierre exclaimed, rubbing his bruised forehead and looking carefully all around to see where it came from.

"I wonder if it was an arrow that hit me," he continued, as he kicked the leaves and cones about, overturned the sack, and examined the trunk of the tree. "Anyhow, whatever it was, I guess I better lie low awhile an' watch out," and throwing the sack over his shoulder, he dodged about among the trees until he reached the shelter of the elder bushes.

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"Hello here! I've struck the trail already," he exclaimed, as his eyes rested on the wilted leaves hanging from the broken twigs, and his face brightened at the discovery.

Unmindful of possible danger, and overcome for the time with enthusiasm and the love of adventure, he found the situation very satisfactory, especially when he thought of the imaginary arrow that had bruised his forehead. Possibly he would have felt differently if he had known just what did hit him.

"I only wish I had dad's old musket," he said. "I'd follow the sneak an' give him a dose stronger than his old arrow," and he dropped the sack and began to investigate the signs.

"Yes," he continued, while he separated the bushes carefully; "he climbed the bank an' crawled along here, an' there's his paddle, an' down yonder on the beach is his canoe. An' now let's see which way he went."

Critically noticing each broken twig and the lie of each bent blade of grass, he reached the open space. His eyes followed the zigzag line through the tall grass that ended at the sapling, and then, for the first time since he had been

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so suddenly aroused from his sleep, he thought of the pony.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Horse Thief," he cried, "I understand all about it now."

He examined the ground very carefully, and his keen eye noticed the small hoof mark in the damp sod and, near it, the broad, flat-heeled moccasin print.

Chapter Eight

Following the Trail

AT FIRST, to eyes well trained in the science of wood lore, the trail was easy to follow. Here, a half-healed scar on the trunk of a sapling; over there, a notch in a fallen tree; just beyond, a strip of bark hanging from the splintered trunk of a lightning-blasted oak. And stretching along between the signs of the trail, deep-bedded in the moss and matted turf, were the small hoofprints and the large tracks of the moccasined feet.

Pierre followed these, in and out among the trees, through thorny brush and over fallen timber, across running brooks and around slimy pools. He was a typical pioneer lad, fearless, hardy, and strong, and could endure hardships that a modern athlete would not dare to face.

The loss of his pony had made him very angry; and where the trail marks were near together and easy to find he rushed swiftly along,

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muttering threats of a terrible vengeance on the thief when he caught him. But where the marks were far apart, and the sunken footprints were covered with the dry leaves which the winds had tossed about, his progress was slow and very tedious.

At last the trail ended abruptly on the edge of a great swamp, which reached to the right and the left as far as he could see either way.

The sun was sinking in the west, and the shadows were growing thick and dark. The noises of night in nature's dominion were all round him. Somewhere in the thickets behind him a whippoorwill called home her tardy mate, and far away a wandering nighthawk beat his tattoo. Crickets chirped in a wild grapevine that draped a tall butternut tree. Bullfrogs croaked among the flags and brakes in the marshes, and overhead a drowsy owl stretched its wings and called, "Hoo? hoo?"

"Well, I surely am in a fix now," Pierre remarked, slapping an overgrown mosquito that perched on his nose. "I've lost the trail, and I've lost myself too. There's no goin' across lots here. I'm a smart one, I am. But this swamp

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must have an end somewhere, an' I guess about the best thing I can do is to follow the edge till I find it."

He turned to the right, and then to the left, and then looked behind him, utterly at a loss which way to go.

"Well, this is a hard one," he confessed to himself. "Who knows which is which, an' where is where? But one way is just as safe as the other, I suppose. I'll flip a penny an' go by that," and he drew a battered cent from his pocket.

It was the only coin he possessed. He polished it on his coat sleeve, then carefully poised it on his finger and tossed it in the air.

"Heads, I go to the right; tails, I go to the left," he said.

There was a splash, and the coin sank out of sight in the black swamp water. Pierre separated the clumps of cat-tails and rushes and stretched his neck between, in a vain attempt to catch a glimpse of the penny before it disappeared.

"Another fool trick," he muttered. "There goes my lucky piece. I might have known better than to flip it so near the water." Thoroughly

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vexed by his ill luck, he turned impulsively to the right and started on his way.

With many tumbles over half-sunken logs, unexpected baths in the mucky water, and a continuous war with the hungry mosquitoes, he followed the edge of the swamp until darkness and a great patch of tangled blackberry vines prevented further progress.

"Well, here we are," he said, as he poked some of the thimble-shaped berries into his mouth. "These berries taste mighty good; but they aren't very fillin', an' I'm awful hungry. I suppose ma'am's lookin' for me about now, an' keepin' my supper hot, an' scoldin' because I'm not there to eat it. But ginger! if I didn't forget all about the sack of Injun meal. It's down there by the river shore, if the thieves haven't carried it away. Well, I can't help it now, as I can see. An' there's no use of thinkin' about going back after it tonight. I've got to stay right where I am till daylight, an' make the best of it."

Pierre was a resourceful lad, ready with practical ideas in any emergency. This was not the first time he had been obliged to make his bed

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in the forest. He scraped the leaves together round the trunk of a low-spreading beech tree that grew near the edge of the swamp and, without further ceremony, stretched himself out on the rustling heap and was soon fast asleep.

It was a cloudless night. The stars twinkled through the open spaces between the branches, and the falling beechnuts pattered on the dry leaves. Stealthy footsteps, crackling twigs, and rustling leaves disturbed the silence, where the night prowlers were busy in search of food. They were working all round him, the larger and stronger preying on the weaker.

But Pierre slept on, all unconscious of the moving creatures so near him. He dreamed of the supper he had not eaten, and of his sister Polly. She patted his forehead and stroked his cheek and then drew her hand very slowly across his bare neck. He shivered, moved uneasily, and muttered: "Dry your hands, Polly. They're wet and cold."

But the dampness and the chilly feeling that followed awakened him from his dream. For an instant he was so thoroughly paralyzed with fear that he could not move.

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A long, heavy snake was dragging its cold, slimy body across his bare throat!

A prickling sensation accompanied the slow, writhing movement of the reptile, and the sickening odor almost suffocated him. But his native courage, together with his many startling experiences in the past, served him well in this horrible emergency.

Fully realizing the necessity of prompt action, he grasped the snake with both hands, threw it aside, and sprang to his feet. The next moment he was astride a limb well up on the tree overhead.

"Whew! I'm just about choked," he exclaimed, rubbing his throat with the back of his hand and wiping the moisture from his forehead. "That must have been a water snake, it felt so wet and cold. An' I'll bet there's lots more where he came from. Well, I s'pose I'll have to roost right here till daylight, anyway," and he wedged himself well in against the tree in as comfortable a position as was possible.

The night was passing, and the stars were growing pale. The night prowlers, with satisfied appetites, were resting quietly in their lairs. The

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silence became monotonous, and Pierre grew drowsy. He tried all the methods he had heard about to keep himself awake, and invented many new ones, fearing that if he once fell asleep he might lose his balance and fall to the ground. He shivered at the thought, and drew his collar up round his throat.

"I've had enough of snakes for one night," he remarked. "I wouldn't mind 'em so much by daylight; but when they tackle a fellow in the dark, it makes him feel kind of creepy."

But somehow, in spite of all his efforts to prevent it, he fell asleep. How long he slept, he never knew; but when he awoke the sun was shining in his face and something was tugging at his foot, which hung below the branch on which he sat.

His first thought was of snakes; but one glance below gave him a glimpse of a far more dangerous enemy than a harmless water snake, and sent him scampering hand over hand toward the top of the tree. An angry growl followed him, and his heart thumped wildly as he looked down on a great black bear standing on his hind legs and hugging the trunk of the tree.

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Disappointed in his prospects for his morning rations, the baffled animal lowered himself to the ground and began marching round and round the tree, tearing up the earth, tossing the leaves about, and working himself into a frenzy of rage. When he found that this did not bring his game to the ground, he stood erect on his hind feet and looked up into the tree, snarling and growling and grinding his teeth. As he stood he was taller than a very tall man.

Pierre's courage weakened as the angry brute reared a great black hairy head. In all his adventurous life he had never been in quite so desperate a situation; and when the bear threw his paws over the lower limb and began to climb, he lost hope entirely.

The boy scrambled up and up among the slender branches until they bent beneath his weight, and he could go no farther.

All the time the bear, growling and grunting, was slowly advancing. Nearer and nearer he came, until Pierre could look down into the bloodshot eyes and could feel the hot breath on his bare ankles. The great cavernous mouth was wide open, and the long red tongue hung

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out at the side. The twisted yellow teeth ground and grated against each other, and great splashes of foam fell from the folds of the lips.

Pierre's habit of thinking aloud and talking to himself, which had developed through his being alone so much of the time, clung to him on all occasions; and even now, when death seemed so near at hand, the sound of his own voice was very comforting.

"Whew! what ugly fangs," he exclaimed. "Just like the wolf's in 'Little Red Ridin'-hood,' that Gramma used to tell about. But won't they make hash of me if he once gets hold of me!"

Just then the bear grunted and gave another upward hitch, and Pierre drew his feet under him with a shudder.

"I wonder how ma'am would feel if she could see me just now. I suppose she would scold me for gettin' into such a scrape. But I'm sure they'll all feel sorry when they find out what's become of me," and two big tears gathered in the corners of his eyes and rolled unheeded down his flushed cheeks.

"But how'll they ever know it, if I'm eaten

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up?" he asked himself, and he trembled with excitement as he thought of his own mangled self strewn over the ground round the tree. He almost imagined he could hear the bear crunching his bones. "Mebby they'll find some of my clothes," he continued, trying to smooth the wrinkles in his homespun jacket. "He can't eat them, anyhow."

The situation was becoming more and more critical every moment. Pierre, already weak and faint from his long fast, was shaking with fear and cold. The bear had climbed until he could go no farther. When the slender branches bent under his great weight, he settled back on his haunches in a convenient crotch, his mouth within a few inches of the poor lad's feet, and waited impatiently for his breakfast.

Pierre could not talk now. He could only think. He felt that death was very near. And such a horrible death! It was only a question of time and endurance before the bear would be feasting on his bones at the foot of the tree. He closed his eyes and tried to pray, whispering slowly the first line of the only prayer he knew: "Now I lay me down to sleep."

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Hark! was that a voice? No; it was only a catbird calling, and yet it relieved the dreadful strain on Pierre's nerves, and he began to listen for other sounds.

The sharp crack of a stick breaking under the foot of some moving creature seemed to bring companionship near. The bear sniffed and moved uneasily, as if scenting danger, then settled back again and licked his puffy chops in anticipation of his morning meal.

Pierre was wide awake now, listening intently. He was certain that he heard voices in the distance, faint at first, but gradually growing louder as they drew nearer. And then he heard footsteps rustling the leaves.

The bear growled and began to back downward, slowly and clumsily, and Pierre's elastic spirits rose several degrees with the prospect of escape from his enemy. He opened his mouth to call for help just as a band of Indians came in sight.

"Great guns!" he exclaimed. "What'll come next? First the snake, then the bear, an' now this gang, an' all on the same spot. I guess I better keep shady for a while," and, almost

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holding his breath, he crawled back among the branches where the leaves were thick.

A great shout arose from the Indians when they saw the bear helpless and at their mercy. A shower of arrows pierced his body and the tree trunk all round him, and a well-aimed tomahawk, wedged in his skull, finished the work.

The savages danced wildly round the body, fairly crazed over their prize. And then, to Pierre's dismay, they began making preparations for a feast.

"That fixes me," Pierre muttered. "I'm treed for the rest of the day an' mebbly for the night as well. They're on the warpath for sure, an' I've got to be mighty careful if I expect to get off with a whole head."

With wild whoops and yells and all sorts of savage exclamations, the Indians proceeded with their work. Some stripped the animal and hung the skin on the branches of the tree to dry, some brought wood for the fire, and others went in search of clear water.

When the preparations were all completed, they seated themselves in a circle round the fire.

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Then each one of the party thrust a pointed stick through a piece of the flesh, still dripping with the warm blood, and cooked it over the flames. Pierre smacked his lips as the tempting odors rose.

"Turn about's fair play, Mr. Bear," he whispered. "'Tisn't so very long ago that your mouth was frothing when you expected to breakfast on me, an' now I'd like, first rate, to breakfast on you."

The Indians feasted and gorged themselves on the half-cooked flesh, washing it down with frequent drafts from a large earthen jug, until they became stupid. Then, one after another, they crawled away from the fire, stretched themselves out on the ground, and sank into a heavy sleep.

Not until the last one had joined the sleepers did Pierre venture to take a look at the gluttonous warriors. Their upturned faces, coarse, square, and bronzed, were hideous with war paint. The fragments of the feast, pieces of meat and bones, were scattered about, and the empty jug, bottom upward, was in a hollow stump. A long pole leaned against a tree not far

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away, and fastened to it were several objects that sent the blood from Pierre's face and made him faint and dizzy.

"There's one that looks just like Polly's," he thought; "just the color, an' curly too. I wonder if I can't get out of here while they're asleep. I must get home an' see what's happened. If dad's in trouble, he'll need me. I'll try it, anyhow; so here goes."

Slowly and cautiously he lowered himself from limb to limb, pausing occasionally to locate each sleeper and to map out his course when he reached the ground. Fortunately the Indians were all lying on one side of the tree, near the swamp, leaving a clear space from the fire to the fringe of brush along the edge of the forest.

Pierre slid down the trunk to the ground, and was about to start when an appetizing odor reached his nostrils, and at the same moment he caught a glimpse of a piece of meat, crisp and brown, sizzling over the fire on the end of a stick.

"Lucky for me," he whispered. "I guess they knew how hungry I'd be."

It was a risky venture, but Pierre was des-

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perate from hunger. In and out among the prostrate forms he tiptoed, over outstretched hands clutching glistening tomahawks and blood-stained knives, until he reached the spot and secured the tempting prize. Back he tiptoed, lightly as before; then, the last savage passed, he worked his way well into the underbrush before he dared to taste the meat. Tearing off a large tender piece, he said, as he poked it into his mouth, "I'll take their back trail till I find out just where I am."

Chapter Nine

Aunt Betsy's Soft Soap

THE great iron caldron hung from a pole over the fire, which was burning on the ground near the river shore, and Aunt Betsy was stirring the foaming contents with a long-handled wooden spoon. An occasional uprising would send the bubbling mass on a wild race to the top of the kettle, but a dash of cold water from the bucket at her side and a vigorous stirring would send it back again. A peculiar odor, not at all pleasing, rose from the steam and mingled with the smoke from the fire underneath. Aunt Betsy was making soft soap.

"It's about done now," she said as she dipped a small quantity into a pewter basin and set it on a stump to cool. "I'll let it simmer while I go inside and see about supper."

Very quickly Aunt Betsy got the supper under way. The teakettle, hanging from the crane in the fireplace, was soon singing merrily,

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the smoked meat sputtered and crisped in the frying pan, and the potatoes, in their own brown jackets, puffed and popped open in the bed of hot ashes between the andirons.

The room was filled with many sounds. There was the swish of Aunt Betsy's stiffly starched calico skirt, that kept time with her feet as they stamped over the bare floor, the roaring of the hickory fire up the chimney flue, and the clattering of the dishes as she set the table.

And when the chips and bits of broken bark behind the woodpile cracked under the careful tread of moccasined feet, she did not hear the noise; neither did she see the stooping figure that skulked behind the corncrib while she stood in the doorway, fanning her heated face with a large leaf from the pie plant that grew by the side of the step.

"Everything's all ready now," she exclaimed, "an' I do wish they'd come along home. If there's anything I detest, it's this waitin' for folks to come to their meals. Like as not, Pierre's stopped up to the new house, waiting to come down with father an' Polly. I hope he's got the Injun meal all right."

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Up at the new house Polly and Uncle Jerry had found something more interesting than supper.

A party of half-breed canoemen were at work digging the cellar. They were a noisy, boisterous crowd, brimming over with mirth and music. Their costumes were quaint and picturesque, a combination of savage and civilized fashions. Their long-tasseled knitted caps were perched jauntily on the back of their heads, and their long red-flannel overshirts were belted in at the waist with gay striped woolen sashes. They wore fringed buckskin leggings and shoepacs of Indian manufacture.

They worked in unison, with a regular movement, the earth flying from their shovels to the rhythmical accompaniment of their favorite paddle songs.

Polly watched them while she knitted the clouded blue and white woolen stocking. Ten times round was her stint, and then she might play. And playing "housekeep" was such fun, with everything she needed all round her. There was a low flat stump for a table, already spread with acorn cups and saucers, and there were mandrakes and beechnuts for dinner, with rasp-

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berries and wintergreens for dessert, and clear cold water from the spring for tea.

Polly finished her stint, rolled her knitting work, and stuck the needles through the ball of yarn. She did not notice that anything had happened until after she had jumped down from her seat on the stump and put her work in her father's coat pocket. And then she saw that the men had all stopped working and were gathered in a group talking in low tones, while her father stood near them with an anxious expression on his face.

The men cast hasty glances up and down the river and then toward the forest. Becoming satisfied that no one was approaching, they bent over and examined the fresh earth which they had just thrown out of the cellar, sifting it through their fingers while they talked excitedly in some strange language which Polly could not understand.

At first she was frightened, and half tempted to run home, but when her father glanced at her and smiled, she ran to his side instead.

Gradually the excitement died away; and, one after another, the men picked up their

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shovels, and soon they were all busy at work, singing as merrily as if nothing had disturbed them. Then Uncle Jerry led Polly to the pile of earth which was the cause of all the commotion.

"What do you think of that, daughter?" he asked, pointing to the sparkling heap.

Polly's eyes almost danced at the sight. She had always wanted bead necklaces and bracelets such as the Indian girls wore, but so far in her life she had never had any. She danced round the heap, laughing and clapping her hands. Now she could have all the beads she wanted. There they were, scattered through the damp earth, beads of all colors and all sizes, more than she had ever seen in all her life.

Without a question as to how they happened to be there in such quantities, she gathered up the two corners of her linen pinafore and began to pick them up.

She filled the little pocket on the front of her frock and the pewter drinking cup she had brought from home. Soon her pinafore was running over, and yet there seemed to be just as many left as when she first saw them.

"Come, Polly," her father said, when it was

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time to stop work, "we must go home now. You can't take 'em all this time. You'll have to come again an' bring the water bucket, I guess," and he smiled good-naturedly when he saw her turn slowly away from the tempting array.

Aunt Betsy, having become impatient and hungry, met Polly and her father when they were halfway home.

"Where's that boy Pierre?" she asked.

"Why, isn't he here? I was almost sure I heard the pony whinny just before we started," Uncle Jerry replied, looking back toward the cellar.

"No, he isn't here, an' no Injun meal for bread, either. I never in all my life saw such a slow poke as he's gettin' to be."

"Oh, tut! tut! mother, don't fret. I daresay there's some good reason for it. Mebby the mill isn't running, or somebody got in ahead of him. You know it's come first, serve first, down there, an' he's got to take his turn with the rest." And then in a lower voice, that Polly might not hear him, he continued: "There may be another reason why he isn't here. There's a lot of strange Indians skulkin' round, an' there's

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no tellin' what mischief they're now brewing. There's chances we may have trouble up at the cellar. The men are looking for it. They're pretty near some of the old graves now; an' if they should happen to dig into them, there's sure to be trouble. Did you see what they threw out today?" he asked, pointing to the beads that Polly was just carrying into her playhouse.

Aunt Betsy nodded her head and hurried into the house, forgetting her worries about Pierre in her eagerness to serve the long-delayed supper and get it out of her sight.

Uncle Jerry filled the tin washbasin with water from the long rain trough that stood under the eaves, and placed it on the bench in the shade of the cherry tree; and then, with much splashing and spattering and a profuse lathering with soft soap, he proceeded to wash his face and hands.

Suddenly there sounded behind him a terrific shriek of rage and pain, ending with a long, quavering whoop. Half blinded with the soap and water, and temporarily helpless, Uncle Jerry's first impulse was to seek the shelter of the house, while wild visions of tomahawks and

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scalping knives flashed in a confused picture through his brain.

Aunt Betsy heard the noise at the same time and rushed out to investigate. The doorway was narrow, and, of course, two could not pass through where there was only room for one. As a consequence, there was a collision on the threshold.

"Sakes alive, father," cried Aunt Betsy, "why don't you look where you're going?"

But even before Uncle Jerry could pick himself up from the rose bed into which he had fallen, Polly, who had been in the playhouse sorting her beads, came tumbling upon him.

"Oh, father, father," she cried, "there's a great big Indian down by the soap kettle, an' he's makin' an awful fuss about something."

Up jumped Uncle Jerry and ran to the soap kettle, while Polly and Aunt Betsy dashed close at his heels.

"Look at the thief, mother," and Uncle Jerry pointed his finger at the tall Indian, who stood near the steaming caldron. "I guess he's bit off more'n he can swaller this time. He's tame as a calf, isn't he?"

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The Indian was leaning against the stump, with the empty basin on the ground by his side. There was an expression of disgust, mingled with signs of pain, on his face. His mouth was wide open, his lips were blistered, and streams of hot soft soap were trickling down the front of his buckskin garments.

"The sneakin', thievin' critter," Aunt Betsy exclaimed. "It serves him just right."

As they drew near him he cast a threatening glance toward them and then started on a run for the shelter of the forest. Soon after he disappeared they heard a crashing of bushes and a clattering of hoofs on the dry turf.

"I guess he's about lost his likin' for soft soap," Uncle Jerry said, laughing, until the tears rolled down his cheeks; at the comical picture made by the surprised Indian.

"It's good enough for him," Aunt Betsy exclaimed, as she gave the soap a whirl with the spoon. "It's got so I can't leave anything outside, on account of Indians' stealin'. 'T was only yesterday that I set out a bowl of melted beeswax to harden into a cake when I heard a rum-pus, an' there one of 'em stood as stiff as a

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poker, all covered with the beeswax from head to foot. An' my best bowl with blue pagodys on it, that Uncle Ben brought me from Chiny when I was a little girl, was smashed in a dozen pieces at his feet. I wouldn't have had enough of the stuff left to wax a piece of thread if I hadn't took pity on him an' scraped him off. I declare to goodness, I don't know what we're goin' to do with 'em, they're getting so bold. But quit your talkin' an' come on to supper. It's been waiting long enough, I think."

Chapter Ten

Polly and the Indian

THE river rippled and sparkled under the early morning sun. A truant ray peeped through a pane of crooked glass in the little east window and settled on Aunt Betsy's nose, rousing her from a troubled dream.

"Land's sakes alive, father," she exclaimed, springing from the curtained high-poster bed that stood in the corner. "We're terrible late this mornin'. Here it's sunup, an' not a thing done. But somehow I couldn't get to sleep till near daylight, frettin' about Pierre. I do hope nothin's happened to him. An' till he comes we won't have any Injun meal. An' not another blessed ear of corn to be got in the whole settlement, neither for love nor money."

"Oh, don't fret, mother. The boy'll turn up all right," and Uncle Jerry gave his yarn galuses an extra hitch and drew on his homespun blouse. "Like as not he stayed down in the mill

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all night. There's no telling, however, where he may be treed, now that the red imps have broke loose again. But wherever he is, he knows enough to take care of himself, so don't fret. I wish Paul was with him for company."

Aunt Betsy shook her head doubtfully. The arguments were not convincing.

"It's all well enough for you to talk, but that doesn't help matters," she said, as she raked open the ashes in the fireplace and crisscrossed some strips of pitch pine over the live coals. "When it comes to this time of year, just between hay an' grass, an' no knowin' whether you've got any Injun meal or not, it's no laughing matter, I tell you."

The breakfast was cooked and eaten, and Polly was still fast asleep in the little trundle-bed that stood in the protecting shadow of the four-poster.

"Don't wake her up till after I'm gone," said her father. "She'll want to go with me, but you better keep her here. There's likely to be trouble up at the cellar today, an' if there is, it's no place for her. Be careful an' keep the door fastened good, too. You can't tell when

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some of 'em will sneak in on you. I'll leave the old musket, in case you need it, an' I'll take the rifle."

Aunt Betsy closed the door behind him, drew in the latchstring, and placed the heavy oak crossbar in the sockets. She took the old musket from the antler rack over the fireplace and stood it behind the door ready for use if she should need it, and then she climbed up to the high seat in the center of the loom.

Aunt Betsy was never idle, and when there was nothing else for her to do she sat at the loom and wove cloth. The heavy timbers were soon creaking and rattling as she worked the treadles with her feet and sent the filling shuttles back and forth between the two rows of blue and red warp. Now and then the machinery stopped while she turned the big roller round and round and wound another yard of the red and blue check flannel she was weaving for Uncle Jerry's shirts and Polly's winter frocks.

When Polly awoke she ate her breakfast, washed the dishes, and then threaded her beads on long strings. She plaited them into necklaces and bracelets and fastened them round her

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neck and arms, just as she had seen the little Indian girls wear them.

"Now I wish I had the red ones that I left down in the playhouse," she said as she shook down her skirts and stood by the loom.

"There's no use in your wishin', Polly. You can't go outside till father comes. We've both got to stay right here an' watch out for the bad Indians."

"I'm not afraid of Indians. They dassent hurt me," and Polly's lip curled defiantly.

"You just keep still, my girl. Don't you talk back to me. Go on with your play now an' behave yourself."

Polly pouted awhile and then settled down to her beads, stringing and plaiting them all over again.

The sun climbed up the eastern slope of the sky, higher and higher, until a downward ray reached the noon mark on the doorsill. Polly became thirsty, but the water bucket was empty.

"Take a drink of milk," said her mother.

But milk did not quench her thirst. Aunt Betsy, too, longed for a drink. She had become overheated from her exercise at the loom, and

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the more she thought about the empty bucket, the more she felt she must get water somehow.

She examined the teapot, but Polly had washed and dried it thoroughly. And then she looked out the window and wondered if there really was any danger.

The river rushed along, blue and tempting; and as far as she could see in either direction, there was not a sign of danger anywhere. It would take but a few minutes to get the water, and they could not wait until night for a drink. Even now her own throat was dry and parched, and Polly was just ready to cry.

Although Aunt Betsy was somewhat of a scold and had decided views in regard to the proper management of children, her scolding was harmless, and she was a thoroughly good mother; and when she saw the thirsty child trying to drain a few drops of water from the heavy iron teakettle, her mother love conquered all sense of fear, and she decided to get the water.

She lifted the bar, opened the door, and looked out. The fresh breeze from the river cooled her heated face, and she could smell the fishy odor rising from the water. Not a living thing could

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she see, except a mother robin who was trying to teach her half-clad young ones how to fly from the home nest in the apple tree.

She snatched the bucket from the bench and started on a run toward the narrow water dock that reached out into the river in front of the house. Polly followed her. Now was her chance to get the red beads from the playhouse.

Because of her haste and her unusually excited condition, Aunt Betsy did not hear a smothered shriek; neither did she hear the low whinny of recognition from the pony that stood behind the woodpile. But she did hear the clatter of hoofs when she stooped to dip up the water. She turned round just in time to see her dear little Polly on Pierre's pony, tightly clasped in the arms of the very same Indian who had visited the soap kettle.

For an instant Aunt Betsy was horrified almost to a state of helplessness. She swayed on her feet as if about to fall. She forgot all about her thirst. The water bucket slipped from her hand and floated away on the current.

But she suddenly rallied as she thought of the musket behind the door, and she ran swiftly

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toward the house. If she could reach it in time, she might be able to bring the pony to the ground and save poor Polly.

The sounds made by the clattering hoofs were already growing fainter. It seemed hours to her before she reached the door. And when she did reach it she found it closed, with the latchstring inside. Without a thought of what this might mean, she threw herself against it with all her strength, hoping to break the fastening, but in vain. The latch was of strong tough oak and made especially to resist a far more powerful attack than she was capable of making.

Almost frantic she then turned to the little window, snatching a stone as she turned, with the thought of breaking the sash and crawling through the opening; but she forgot her size. The window was very small; and, beside this, when she stood in front of it, ready to hurl the stone, she saw a great copper-colored face flattened against the crooked pane of glass and a pair of wicked glittering eyes looking out at her.

By this time Polly and the pony were out of sight, and there was nothing to do but to carry the news to Uncle Jerry as quickly as possible.

Chapter Eleven

A Mokok of War Paint

WHEN Uncle Jerry arrived at the cellar in the morning, the half-breeds were unusually quiet, and busy at work. The discovery of the beads, and then of other Indian relics, had warned them that they were trespassing on an Indian burial spot. Besides, there were uncertain rumors of trouble with the Indians in the vicinity of the fort-village, which caused them much uneasiness.

Their guns were stacked within easy reach, and they cast anxious glances toward the forest. But as the morning advanced, they gradually became more cheerful. Occasionally their voices again rose in the familiar refrains of the boat songs, and by noon their uneasiness and caution had entirely vanished. Their guns were scattered carelessly about, and they were more noisy and more boisterous than ever before.

Uncle Jerry's suspicions were aroused, and

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their frequent visits to a hollow stump close by led him to investigate. The familiar gray jug with the corncob stopper, from the trader's supply store, told its own story.

He was much disturbed by the discovery, although he had expected something of the kind. He turned the jug upside down and watched the last drop trickle through the powdered pitch of the stump, without being noticed.

The excavation had now begun to show the shape and size of the cellar. The corners were all angled, the area-way sides were smoothed, and only a pile of undisturbed clay remained in the center.

The men gave a loud shout as they attacked it, and the damp earth flew from the shovels in a succession of showers.

Suddenly there was a sharp, ringing sound as one of the shovels struck some hard substance, and the next moment a small copper kettle was thrown to the surface.

This was followed by the uncovering of several other articles that had once belonged to Indians now in the Happy Hunting Grounds. There were rusty tomahawks and knives, flint

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arrow points, tattered strings of wampum, and a large birch-bark mokok filled with war paint of various colors.

The men were much excited when they saw the paint. They lifted it to the surface and examined it carefully. All the sleeping instincts of their half-savage nature were aroused by the sight of it. They crowded round the partly decayed mokok, dipped their fingers in the moist paint, and drew them diagonally across their cheeks and foreheads, leaving broad stripes of red, yellow, and black. While they were doing this they shouted and whooped like madmen. They executed a savage war dance round the relics and struck imaginary enemies with the knives and tomahawks.

Uncle Jerry sat on a log, at a safe distance, and watched them anxiously. He was familiar with the burial customs of the Indians, and he knew that there was nothing which so aroused their anger as the disturbance of anything that had been left in or on the graves of their friends.

Although he was sure that the bodies of the red men who had once owned these relics would soon be reached by the diggers, he felt that it

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was not safe to meddle with the half-breeds while they were in their present excited condition.

"Let 'em have it out, an' then they'll behave themselves," he said. "There's no use in my sayin' anything to 'em just now. As like as not they'd go for me if I did. They're worse than full-blooded Indians when once they get agoing."

Uncle Jerry was worried. He heard a noise and looked behind him, but it was only a rabbit that galloped across the lane and hid in a brush heap.

"It's to be hoped there aren't any of the tribe skulkin' round here now where they'll hear the rumpus. If there are, there's sure to be trouble."

"Wough! wough!"

Uncle Jerry heard it first — that favorite Indian exclamation, which was used to express almost any phase of the red man's various emotions, anger, surprise, or pleasure, according to circumstances.

So stealthy had been the approach of the savages, and so light their footsteps, that they were standing near the cellar, a dozen or more of them, before they were noticed.

When they saw the relics carelessly scattered

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about and then the disturbed graves, they were furious. Their voices rose in loud angry tones; and before the half-breeds, who were now thoroughly sobered, fully realized what had happened, sharp arrows and tomahawks were flying through the air, knives were flashing dangerously near, and the loud war whoop sounded all round them. There was a wild scramble for the scattered guns and the shelter of the trees.

Fortunately the attacking party was small and armed only with their native weapons.

When the smoke from the promiscuous firing of the half-breeds' guns had cleared away, not an Indian was in sight, and only a trail of blood reaching out into the forest told the story of their flight.

The workmen, huddled together, with their guns all ready for action in case of another attack and with their pale, frightened faces daubed with the war paint, were nursing the knife cuts and arrow wounds they had received in the conflict.

Uncle Jerry pulled a jagged flint arrow point from his wrist and bound the wound with his homespun-linen handkerchief. Just as he was

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tightening the knot with the aid of his teeth, the big gate at the head of the lane swung open, and Aunt Betsy, almost breathless from excitement and running up the hill, cried out as loud as she could: "Oh, father, come home just as quick as you can get there. The Indians have carried Polly away."

The men forgot their wounds and ran to meet her. She told her story, her voice trembling with grief as she thought of the possible fate of the poor little captive. The half-breeds were very fond of little Polly, and with but a single word from their leader they started to her rescue.

When they reached the house the door stood wide open, and the Indian had disappeared. A thorough search of the premises was made, but Polly could not be found. The red beads were scattered about near the playhouse, and the deep hoofprints behind the woodpile showed where the pony had stamped and pawed and jerked at his tether.

After a hurried consultation with Uncle Jerry, the half-breeds started out over the fresh pony trail to find Polly, leaving her father and mother to guard the lonely home.



With but a word from their leader the half-breeds started to Polly's rescue

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"Don't you believe the soldiers could help us, father?" Aunt Betsy asked, casting a wistful glance at the fort.

"No, mother; they can't do it," was the reply. "They can't spare the men. They haven't got enough of 'em in there now, all told, to save the fort if the Indians should come in on us in full force, which they are likely to do at any time. It's a mighty hard thing to think of our baby off there in the woods, alone with those savages, but we've got to depend on the half-breeds to save her, an' they'll do it, mother. Don't you fret. You'll get her back again. An' I'll go over an' see what Paul thinks about starting out after Pierre."

But Paul was not at home. As soon as he had heard that Pierre was missing, he had disappeared, and no one knew where he had gone.

"Paul's the right kind of stuff, mother," said Uncle Jerry, as he entered the house on his return. "You mark my words, he's gone to hunt up Pierre, an' he'll strike his trail too. Everything will come out all right, an' you'll have your family together again by the time you get ready for 'em."

Chapter Twelve

The Reunion

THE shadows of the night had settled down and wrapped the forests in their dark folds.

A bed of wood moss sloped downward from a tree trunk toward a noisy hurrying stream, and on it lay the little captive. Her hands were scratched and bruised, and her pretty hair was all tangled and out of curl.

Not far away, with his blanket wound round him and his head half buried in the leaves, was her Indian captor, fast asleep. He knew that his captive was altogether too young and helpless to make any attempt to escape, and he also knew that he had covered his trail so completely that there was no possibility of their being followed.

The pony was tethered near the stream and so close to Polly that she could hear the crunching of his teeth as he munched the rank coarse grass.

The journey had been a wearisome and excit-

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ing one. At first the pony had stubbornly refused to leave his home again. He was tired and hungry, and the tall tufts of timothy and clover were nodding and beckoning to him from the corners of the garden fence. Although the Indian jerked and pulled the rope tether, he persisted in trotting round and round in a circle.

The Indian had become very angry; and when he saw Aunt Betsy running up the lane toward the cellar, he threw Polly across the pony's back, face downward. Then clutching her skirts in his hand to hold her in place, he jumped up in front of her and began to kick the poor beast and beat him with his tomahawk until he bounded forward in terror.

The cruel jolting sent the blood to Polly's head and nearly blinded her. The sharp thorns on the overhanging branches scratched her hands and pulled her hair. Her necklace and bracelets were broken, and her beads were scattered along the trail.

Would they never, never stop, Polly asked herself, as her face bumped and bumped against the pony's side. If they could only go a little slower, she thought, or if the path were only a

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little wider, so that her head and hands would not hit against the rough tree trunks, she could stand it much better.

At last the trail ended in an opening that bordered a stream of water, and then the Indian allowed the panting pony to stop. He let Polly slide to the ground and stood guard over her as she bathed her bruised hands and face, while the pony waded into the stream knee-deep, stamped and pawed, ducked his foaming nostrils, and splashed the cool water over his body. After a very short rest they mounted and started out again.

The Indian placed Polly in front of him this time, for which she was very thankful. The pony was no longer urged, as at first, but was allowed to go his natural gait.

On and on they went, until Polly began to wonder if they would go on forever. She did not care very much what happened to her now, she was so tired and stupid from misery. But at last darkness overtook them, and they could go no farther.

Polly was so hungry and exhausted and frightened, and her face and hands were so pain-

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ful, that she could not sleep. She lay close to the tree, crying quietly. She covered her mouth with her hands that the Indian might not hear her.

It was so dark that she could not see him. Only a shadow near the ground, blacker than the others all round her, told her where he was lying. She could hear his loud breathing, and she knew he was sleeping soundly.

The crickets were chirping, the stream was murmuring, and the gentle breeze was playing among the leaves overhead. As Polly listened to all the quieting sounds, she almost forgot about what had happened to her since she had gone into the playhouse to get her red beads. The sounds gradually blended until they were singing a low and soothing lullaby. Polly's eyelids drooped, her head sank against the tree trunk, and she slept.

Later the pony whinnied and wakened her. When she opened her eyes, she saw a moving object not far away. Very slowly and cautiously it was approaching the tree where she lay.

Polly was terribly frightened. She held her lips together with her hand, fearing she might cry out. As it drew nearer and nearer she sprang

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to her feet and was about to run to the Indian for protection, when she heard a cautious whisper in a voice she recognized: "Don't be afraid, Polly. Keep still. It's only me."

Pierre had followed the stream from its source in a bubbling spring, racing with the swiftly running water and hoping all the time that it might be the very same creek that emptied into the river near the snook hole.

Night had come, but he could not stop. He must hurry home and help dad to guard the house. It grew so dark that he could not see, but that did not matter so long as he could hear the running water. Several times he brushed a tear from his cheek when he thought of what might have happened to Polly, and then he hurried on.

He stumbled over logs and sticks and forced his way through briars and brush. He waded among the rushes and cat-tails that grew along the edge of the stream as high as his shoulders, and in some places over his head, until his foot caught in a tangle of roots and he fell, face downward, under the pony's nose.

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He had almost forgotten the animal, so many exciting things had happened since he had first started out in search of it, but he immediately recognized the whinny which welcomed him.

Eagerly he started to rise to his feet, when he dropped back again. He could hear a faint stir in the darkness. The Indian also had heard the whinny. Immediately he was alert; but since the animal kept silent under the caressing pats of Pierre, he felt reassured and, with a grunt, turned over and was soon asleep again.

When Pierre felt all was safe once more, he climbed quietly to his feet.

"Hello! old fellow, this is great luck, isn't it?" he whispered, as he stroked the pony's rough face. "You didn't expect to see me, did you? But where's the sneak that hooked you? I'd like to get my eye on him a minute. I'll look round a bit, an' then we'll light out."

The eastern sky was brightening now with the glow of the coming moon, and the shadows in the open where Polly lay were gradually growing paler.

At first Pierre thought that the figure under the tree must be the thief, but something in

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the shape and pose of the head as the child leaned forward to watch his movements, seemed strangely familiar. Then when she sprang to her feet and turned toward the sleeping Indian, he recognized her immediately. He sprang to her side, clasped her in his arms, and smoothed her rumpled hair. She threw her arms round his neck and whispered between her sobs: "Take me home, brother; do take me home. You won't let him carry me off any more, will you?"

Pierre clenched his fists and ground his teeth together.

"I'd like to kill him right where he lies," he muttered. "I don't believe 'twould be murder. The miserable brute!"

He listened carefully for a moment to the loud breathing. When he was quite certain that the Indian was still sound asleep, he lifted Polly in his arms and placed her on the pony's back.

"Never mind now, sis," he said, after they were out of sight and hearing of the Indian. "The old thief's fast asleep, an' he'll never know what's become of you. I'd just like to see him caper round when he wakes up an' finds both you an' the pony gone. He'll have a good

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time huntin' our trail. We'll fool him on that, I guess, won't we, little sis?"

And such a zigzag trail it was, now on one side of the stream and now on the other, and then down the middle for a short distance.

Polly's sobs had subsided, and she cuddled down between Pierre's protecting arms, quite contented, while the pony cantered along at an easy pace, sniffing and snorting as if he recognized familiar landmarks.

"I just believe we're on the home stretch, Polly," said Pierre, looking all round to see if he could discover any familiar mark along the banks of the stream. "The pony acts like it, an' there's something about this water an' these trees that makes me agree with him. An' here's this old Indian trail runnin' along the bank, that looks mighty natural."

The moon had risen above the tree tops, and the shadows began to shorten. Pierre was still carefully watching for familiar signs, while the pony cantered along under his double load as if he understood all about it.

"Oh, brother, I'm so glad you found me," and Polly cuddled a little closer in his arms and

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patted and kissed his hands. "I was so 'fraid you wouldn't come after me."

"Oh, never mind about that, little sis. You're all right now an' I'll bet you'll soon see your playhouse. How would that suit you?"

"I'd be so glad," she replied, clapping her hands together. "But my beads are all gone, you know. The strings broke, an' they fell on the ground when the pony was going so fast."

"You just wait. I know where there's plenty more of them, an' I'll get you a whole lot when we get home."

Just at this moment Pierre discovered something he was not looking for.

"Hold on, here, hold on! What's the meaning of this?" he exclaimed, as he checked the pony suddenly and stretched his neck sidewise to get a better view.

There they were, a dozen or more, stretched out on the grass, with the bright moon shining on their upturned faces. Neither Pierre nor Polly recognized the half-breeds. Once on the trail in search of the Indian and his prisoner, the contents of the brown jug had proved too much for them.



"Keep still as a mouse, Polly. We've got the pony, an' we'll give 'em a good run"



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"Out on the warpath," Pierre whispered, when he got a full view of the painted faces. "Now keep still as a mouse, Polly. We're in for it again, sure. But if we can only get past 'em, we'll be all right. We've got the pony on our side, an' we'll give 'em a good run."

Unfortunately for Pierre's well-laid plans, a brittle stick cracked under the pony's foot. Pierre gave a signal chirrup, which both animal and rider thoroughly understood, and away they sped, with the whole party in hot pursuit.

The exciting race was somewhat of a comedy. While Pierre supposed he was being pursued by a party of Indian warriors, the pursuing half-breeds, who had recognized the pony, imagined they had struck the trail of the Indian and his captive.

On and on they went, the pony's light feet scarcely touching the ground, and all the time Pierre was patting his neck and talking in his ear to encourage him.

Far behind them they could hear the shouts of their baffled pursuers growing fainter and fainter, but the pony never halted in his swift gallop until the trail was crossed by a long line

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of brush fence which reached away out into the middle of the stream.

And even then he did not really stop. He was in a hurry to get home. He pricked up his ears and, with a long flying leap, carried himself and his two passengers safely over the fence.

"Hurrah, Polly! hurrah! Here we are in the pasture lot," Pierre shouted joyously. "An' just look over yonder! I told you so, didn't I?"

The moon was sailing along in so clear a sky that Polly could see the thin line of smoke curling above the chimney top. Below it she could see the little log house, with its back to the orchard and its face to the river.

The pony never halted until he reached the woodpile. Then Pierre shouted, and Polly cried, and the door flew open, and Uncle Jerry and Aunt Betsy rushed out.

What a joyous reunion it was! The pony was fondled and petted, Pierre was praised, Polly was cried over, and for a time Aunt Betsy forgot to scold. She came very near it, however, when she began making preparations for the family breakfast.

"Not a crumb of johnnycake or bread in the

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house for breakfast," she said. "Pierre, where in the world is that Injun meal?"

But Pierre never had a chance to answer her question. Just at that moment they heard loud excited voices and the sound of many feet approaching the house. With a scream Polly sprang to her father's side.

"Oh, daddy, daddy," she cried, as she caught sight of the visitors through the half-open door, "don't let the Indians carry me off again."

"I don't blame you a bit for bein' afraid of 'em, Polly girl. They do look like the real Indians, don't they? But you just take another peep at 'em, an' you'll see they're all right. They wouldn't hurt you a bit, no more'n I would."

Polly ventured the peep, and laughed heartily when she recognized the half-breeds smiling at her under the splashes of paint that disfigured their faces.

"How funny they look, daddy, don't they?" she exclaimed.

"But what's that comin' now?" asked Uncle Jerry, pointing down the lane toward the river. "It looks like an Indian dragging somethin' on a dangle draw."

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No one could make out just what it was. But Pierre's eyes were young and keen, and he soon solved the mystery.

"'Tisn't an Indian," he exclaimed. "But I know who it is," and away he ran to meet the approaching visitor.

Very soon two were drawing the load instead of one, and it moved faster. As they drew near Pierre shouted: "Ma'am, ma'am, here's your Injun meal all right," and he lifted the sack from the hickory crotch and carried it into the house. "Paul found it down by the shore, just where I left it."

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